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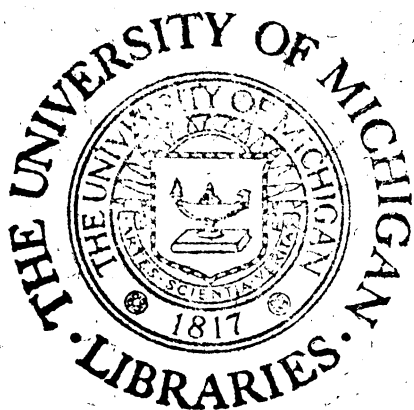
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[See page 32]

THE LITTLE GOOSE GIRL GATHERED HER FLOCK ABOUT HER

KÖNIGSKINDER

[THE ROYAL CHILDREN]

A FAIRY TALE FOUNDED ON THE FAIRY
OPERA OF "KÖNIGSKINDER" FOR WHICH
ENGELBERT HUMPERDINCK WROTE THE
MUSIC, AND ERNST ROSMER THE WORDS

TOLD FOR CHILDREN

BY

ANNA ALICE CHAPIN

AUTHOR OF

"WONDER TALES FROM WAGNER"

ILLUSTRATED FROM PHOTOGRAPHS
OF SCENES IN THE OPERA



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Detroit, Mich.**

**TO
DOCTOR ENGELBERT HUMPERDINCK
THE MASTER OF FAIRY TALES IN MUSIC
THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED**

11^{17/2} Sehr geehrte Damen,
vielen Dank für Ihre freundlichen
Mittheilung betref. d. Kinder Geschichten.
erschreibungen. Es wird mich freuen,
dieser kennen zu lernen und Ihre
Bilderung nehme ich mit der größten
Aufmerksamkeit an!

Mit herzlichsten Abschieden

H. Humpferdick

[TRANSLATION]

GRUNEWALD

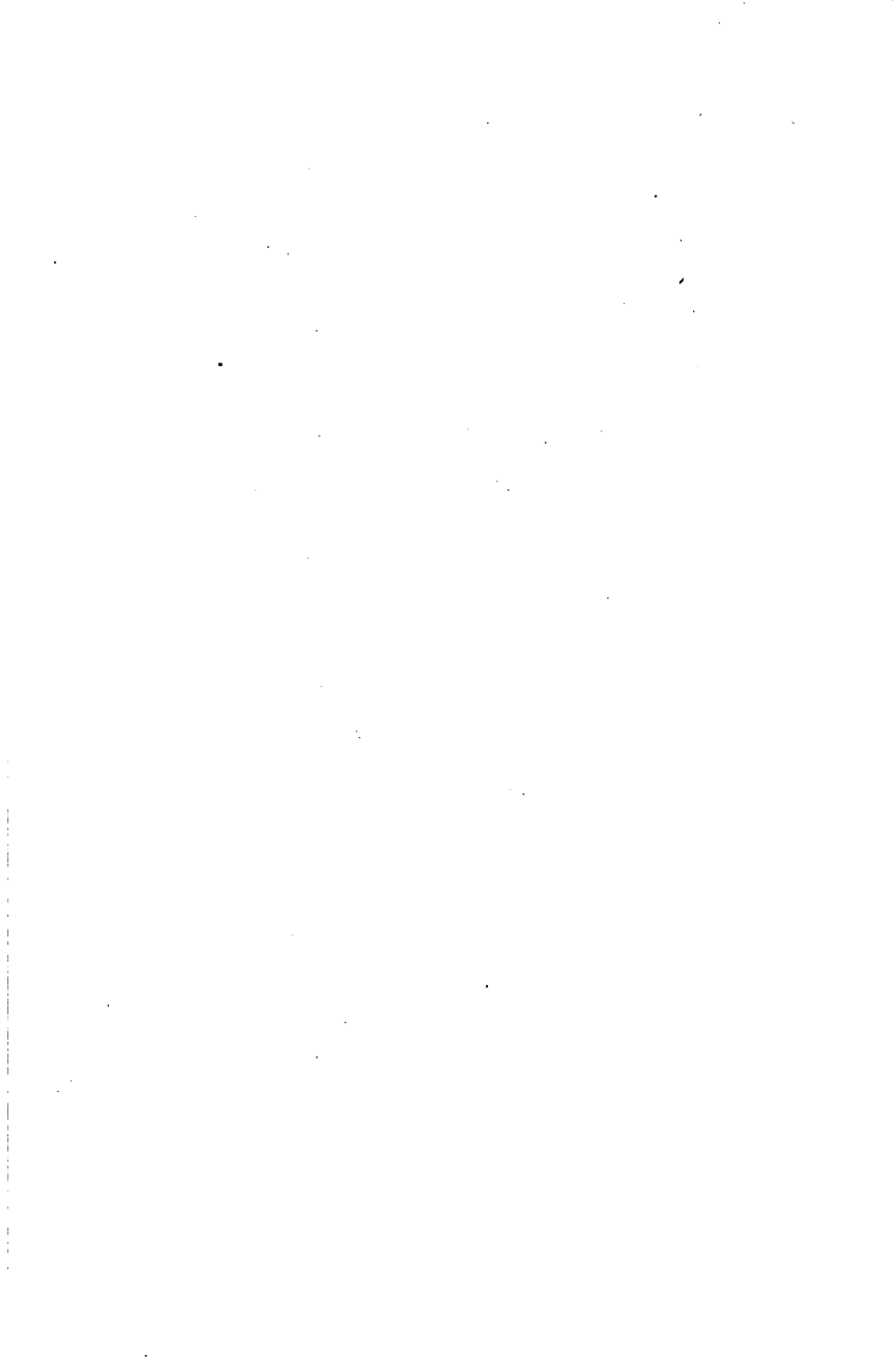
11/17/2

HONOURED MADAM:—

Many thanks for your friendly
letter in regard to the children's stories. I shall
be very glad to see them, and I accept your dedi-
cation with the greatest pleasure.

With highest consideration,

ENGELBERT HUMPERDICK



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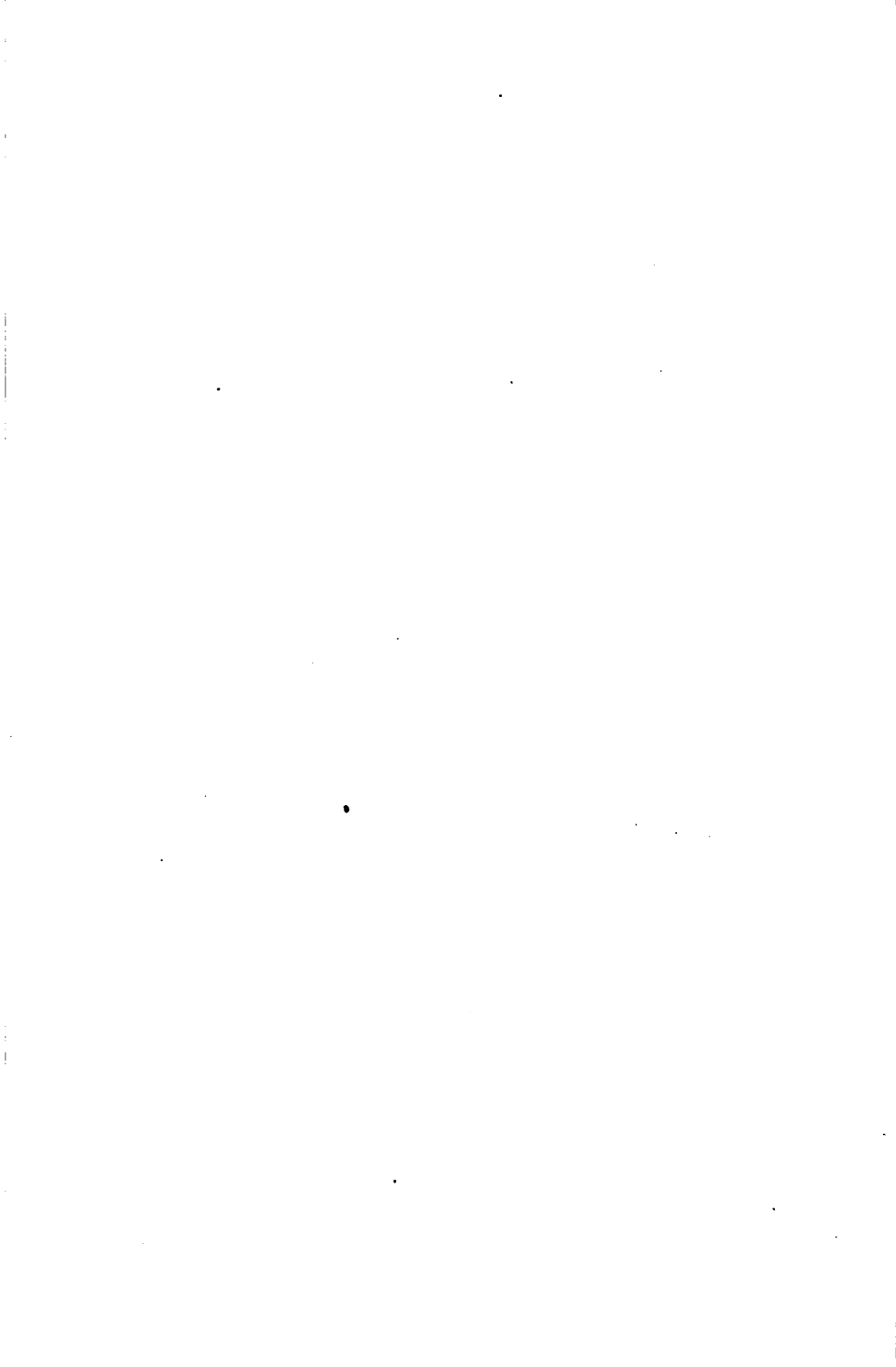
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FIRST OF ALL

"THE ROYAL CHILDREN" is a Fairy Tale in music. The Witch and the Goose Girl, the King's Son and the Fiddler, are beings belonging not only to an enchanted universe, but to a world of music. When you go to see the opera called "Königskinder" (Royal Children) you will see this story happen before your eyes just as I have told it, only it will be more lovely and thrilling than anything that I could ever tell.

And all the tale, in that most wonderful of Fairy Operas, is accompanied by music—buoyant, noble music when the King's Son comes to the clearing; tender, wistful music when the Goose Girl dreams under the linden-tree; pretty, childish music when the Broom-maker's children dance and play; solemn, beautiful music

when the Fiddler sings above the Royal Children.

So, when you read this story you must pretend that you are hearing sweet melodies and perfect chords—whatever music your imagination tells you would fit it best. But when you hear the real airs and the real harmonies you will find it all a thousand times more exquisite than your fancy.

So please *open the ears of your hearts*, as they used to say in the days when folk like the Fiddler made songs, and dream that you are listening to the gayest, saddest, gentlest, and most melodious music that ever carried Mortal people to an Enchanted Forest.

PART I
THE WITCH'S HUT

“ . . . And when I have sung my parting lay,
I'll fling away my fiddle for aye,
To lie where the kingly children are laid.
Ye all, like a human organ swelling,
Shall spread the tale I'm singing and telling,
The song that the old, old Fiddler has made. . . .”

—*The Fiddler's Last Song.*

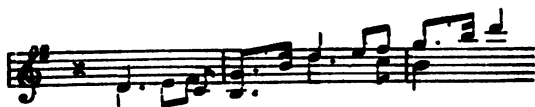
(Trans. by Charles Henry Meltzer.)

KÖNIGSKINDER

CHAPTER I

THE GOOSE GIRL

THIS IS THE LITTLE GOOSE GIRL LOOKING INTO THE
SPRING



AND THIS IS HER REFLECTION IN THE WATER



ONCE upon a time there lived a Witch in a little hut in the very center of an enchanted forest. The forest was very big and wild, and it grew all over a great rocky mountainside. And beyond the mountains might be almost

anything, but nobody ever tried to cross the range.

Far down in the valley was a big, comfortable town, called Hellabrunn, filled with cheerful burghers and pretty children, but they never climbed the hillside. They were afraid of the Enchanted Forest, for they knew that it was full of every kind of savage beast and ghostly goblin, but most of all they were afraid of the Witch.

They had good reason to be, for she was a very remarkable Witch, even in those days when Witches were quite common. She had taken a thorough course in Magic, and there was really nothing she did not know concerning spells, and charms, and secret potions, and mysterious things of that sort.

If you have never been in an Enchanted Forest you have no idea what a frightening place it can be. Of course the trees and stones are alive, as they were in the Black Forest, where Hansel and Gretel got lost. But they are more than alive—they are powerful! They understand things, and can overhear secrets. If the Forest wishes to annoy a person it can twine brambles

across his path, and hoot in his ears, and terrify him till he nearly loses his wits. In an Enchanted Wood the big trees move about. Every single night they change places with one another, and so it is quite impossible for a mortal to know where he is.

And every kind of Fairy creature (except the Sea People) are to be found in a truly Magical Wood—Elves and Giants and Goblins and Gnomes and Dwarfs and Pixies and Flower Fairies and Kobolds and Dragons and Trolls and Kelpies and Brook Elves and Moon Sprites and Mist Maidens and Little People in Green and Ghosts and Dream Folk and Griffins and Ogres and Water Babies and Fairy Beasts and Enchanted Princesses and Mother Goose children and Were Wolves and Wizards and Sorceresses, and at least a million other kinds of Make-Believe Beings which we don't know anything about.

At the edge of the Enchanted Wood there was a huge black Marsh, and the Witch used to go down to it and gather the queer toadstools of different colors which grew there in the mud.

And she would climb the crags above her cottage in search of strange wild herbs, and she would dig for aromatic roots in the darkest, creepiest parts of the dark, creepy Forest. She often went hunting, too, for lizards, and snakes, and toads, and bats.

Just before moonrise—for that is the time that Witches like best to be abroad—she would get a big basket with a lid and strap it upon her crooked old back, and then she would take a heavy, twisted stick to lean on, and hobble away into the darkness, muttering to herself. Before the dawn broke she would come home chuckling, with her basket full and overflowing, and then she would set to work making magical liquids and deadly powders out of the weeds and simples she had brought back.

Sometimes she would go off on her broomstick, too, and there is no telling what manner of dark witchcraft she was about on *those* occasions!

The people of Hellabrunn Town had a great respect for her mysterious powers. Many of them traded with her secretly, for the wisest

of mortals did not know as much about drugs and nostrums as she, and when she went stealthily down to the city to sell her wares, she found plenty of people ready to give her gold-pieces in exchange for remedies and counsel.

Hellabrunn was a prosperous town full of rich people. Many a good burgher was glad to pay a high price for a draught which would cure his sick child. Then, too, there were many wicked persons ready to purchase poisons, and young folk eager for love-potions. So the Witch did a thriving business, and went often among mortals.

She hated everything human, and was always glad to do any one an ill-turn, but she loved gold. Time on time she toiled down into the valley with her heavy basket, to come back with a purseful of clinking coins. She did not spend the money, but she liked to keep it and count it, and hide it away in unlikely corners of her miserable little hut. Most of it she buried deep down where only the moles and earth-worms could find it.

She was not an extravagant person. The only things she bought were kettles and mortars for her magic cookery. So far as her diet was concerned, she lived chiefly on purple snails, and wild cabbage, and deadly nightshade, and poison-ivy, and delicacies of that sort.

And down in Hellabrunn Town her name was only spoken in whispers. They were afraid to call her the Witch; they used to say "The Wise Woman," and "The Lady in the Wood," and "Our Honored Neighbor," for they never could tell when she might be listening at the window or in the chimney. For all they knew, she might at any moment come whisking down on her broom-stick and turn them all into rats or hedgehogs!

Now, perhaps, you may have thought, from what you have been hearing about the Witch in the Wood, that she lived there alone. Indeed, she did nothing of the kind!

First, there was the Yellow Tom Cat, a splendid and savage animal with wild, green eyes—a real Witch Cat. He used to sit on the

tumble-down roof of the hut, close up against the crooked chimney where it was warm, and glare at the sky and growl to himself. Sometimes he accompanied the Witch when she went hunting. They were great friends, and he knew nearly as much as she did. Cats do understand a great deal of witchcraft, you know, even common, every-day cats.

Then there was the Raven. The long feathers on his wings had been clipped short to keep him from flying away, and he used to perch on the ridge-pole and croak. And when he was excited he would dance back and forth from one end of the roof to the other. He did not like the Tom Cat much—I do not believe that he even liked the Witch. He was an exceedingly horrid bird in every way. And he was very unkind to the Little Gray Doves.

There were a number of Doves in the clearing. The Witch did not care for them. They were far too gentle and pretty to please her, but they fluttered about the hut just the same, and made nests in the linden-tree, and cooed softly together every evening. Once in a while

they flew down to the valley to carry messages from the Wild Birds to the gossipy little city Sparrows.

Then there were the Geese. The Witch kept a large flock of them—she sold their eggs to the townspeople. She always said that they were magic eggs, so that they would bring extra high prices. Of course the Geese were fairy Geese, or at least *partly* fairy, anyway; but I doubt if their eggs tasted very differently from the usual kind. They were very beautiful, fat, white Geese, all except the oldest and wisest, who was gray and scraggly, but they were stupid; even fairy Geese have to be stupid. They were rather obstinate, too, and they had not good judgment.

And last—but oh, very far from least!—was the little maid who took care of the Geese and did the Witch's housework. She had never had any regular name; she was just the Goose Girl.

She had lived with the Witch all her life, and called her Grandmother. Of course, she was really no relation. She had just been a poor

little waif whom nobody wanted, and the old dame had brought her up to wait upon her and help her in her Black Arts. She had tried to train her to be a true Witch Child, and in time she intended to teach her to ride a broom-stick. But the Goose Girl was a very bad pupil, for she never learned to like witchcraft. She loved the Geese and the Little Gray Doves, and she loved the woods, and the linden-tree, and the tiny garden which the Witch had allowed her to have. And she was a good girl, and did her best to please her mistress. But she never could be friends with the Yellow Tom Cat or the Raven, fond as she was of animals, and she was too afraid of the dark to go hunting with the Witch.

That horrid old person used to make her boil weird mixtures in her great caldron and grind poisons in the mortar, and the little girl had to learn many spells and charms by heart every day. But it was no use. She hated the night, and she loved the sunlight—the beautiful, golden sunlight, which made the Witch blink her wicked old eyes. The Goose Girl was no true Witch Child, and never would be.

If you will look at the picture of the prettiest Princess in your favorite Fairy Book, you can see what the Goose Girl looked like. She was fourteen years old when this story begins, but she still dressed like quite a little girl. Indeed, the poor child had only one dress, and she had quite outgrown that. It was a shabby, ragged frock of gray homespun. She had made it all herself, and often wished that she might have some pretty ribbons to wear with it. But the Witch did not believe in dressing up her hand-maiden. The old creature herself had worn the same gown (a dusty, musty, rusty, horrible thing) for at least a hundred years, and had no idea of buying another. So why should she waste money on finery for the Goose Girl?

The little maiden usually went barefoot, but sometimes she wore a pair of very worn slippers, queerly cut, like the ones in old-fashioned pictures. And she had one treasure, a scarlet kerchief! It was a lovely color, although she washed it so often that it was a little faded. The Witch made her wear it to hide her beautiful hair, and oh, how glad

the Goose Girl was that it happened to be red!

She had the loveliest hair in all the world—long and soft, and the color of bright gold. When she took off her kerchief it fell about her like a glittering veil, and nearly reached her knees. And her eyes were blue, and her skin was pink and white, like the Mayflowers. Altogether she looked like the most perfect little Princess that you can imagine, and was far, far too pretty and sweet to be nothing but a Goose Girl.

Of course she had no mirror, but sometimes she saw herself in the little clear pool below the spring, and she could not help thinking that what she saw was pretty.

There was a stone basin, with a wooden trough to make it easy to draw the spring-water, and she used to sit on the edge of the basin, and look at her reflection, and wonder if mortal people would think her really and truly nice to look at.

You see, she had never seen another mortal in all her life, and she was curious about them.

She thought she was the Witch's granddaughter, and an outcast from human beings, and so she never dared to go down into the valley where the men and women lived. But she used to make up all manner of fancies about them, and she wished with all her heart that she need not spend her whole life in the Enchanted Forest. And she used to ask herself why she looked so very different from her Grandmother.

She sounds a little vain, but she really was not. The only amusement that she had was dreaming day-dreams, and she never dreamed so nicely as when the Witch was away and she was sitting on the moss-covered stones gazing into the water.

She had never seen beautiful clothes, nor even heard of them, but she knew that the human beings in the valley could not all be dressed in things as ugly as hers. So she would pretend that she was dressed in robes as soft and brightly colored as the wings of the butterflies and the flowers in the Wood.

One day she made herself a wreath of leaves and blossoms and put it on her head.

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She looked for a long time, puzzling, for her reflection seemed to be saying something to her. She did not know what the message was, but it was something odd and new.

THE SONG THE GOOSE GIRL HUMMED UNDER THE
LINDEN-TREE



CHAPTER II

THE KING'S SON

SOME MUSIC FOR KINGS AND QUEENS



NOBODY in Hellabrunn knew what might lie on the other side of the mountain range. Even the Witch did not know. The chain of crags ran jaggedly across the sky as far as the eye could see in both directions, and they were higher, and steeper, and more threatening than any hills that you or I have ever seen.

There were terrible ravines and abysses and roaring rivers and cataracts. In some places the rocks went straight up for hundreds of feet, like the wall of a Giant's house, and there was

no sign of a trail at any point, for neither travelers nor hunters ever tried to explore the Wonderful Mountains.

Some ignorant persons believed that the Mountain chain was the end of the world, and that there was nothing at all beyond it. But there was something—something even more wonderful than the hills themselves. It was a Kingdom, and it was the only absolutely perfect Kingdom on earth.

There the sky was always blue and the wind always warm and soft. There the meadows were bright with flowers and sun, and the forests sweet with moss and shade. There the brooks were full of silver-fish, and the woods were full of deer and brilliant birds. The people were all contented. No one was ill, no one was sad, no one was poor. The men sang in the fields, and the women sang in the houses, and the children sang at play. And the wisest and kindest King in the world ruled over them.

We do not know the name of that happy and lovely country, for it has never been marked down on any map, nor mentioned in

any history books. So we shall have to call it the Contented Kingdom.

Now in the whole Contented Kingdom there was only one soul that was not perfectly happy. And you will never guess whose that was, for it was the most unlikely person imaginable. It was the King's son—the fortunate young Prince of the realm!

Just think! In that golden, peaceful, flowery land, which was his very own; with everything on earth that any one could wish for; cared for by a loving father and mother, and by servants and subjects almost as loving, this foolish lad was discontented.

He was a very nice boy, you must know, and not of a fault-finding, disagreeable disposition; but he was just a trifle spoiled. He had really had too much good fortune—too many playthings and sweets while he was a little fellow, and too much attention and devotion when he began to grow bigger.

As a tiny baby he slept in a beautiful cradle made of solid gold, and his rattle was set with rubies and diamonds and other precious stones.

When he began to walk he had silver toys, made by the master-workmen of the country—mechanical toys which might just as well have been alive, they went so splendidly, and other things fashioned only to look at, more exquisite than anything in any shop.

His doublet and smock and hose and cap and shoes were always made of the richest silks and velvets, and sewn with gold thread. The old women in the Kingdom used to spin the thread out of great lumps of gold, and send it to the Palace in basket-loads, to be used just to embroider the clothes of the little Prince.

When he grew old enough for sports he had a snow-white pony with silver shoes and a bridle studded with sapphires. His saddle was of gold, and the feather in his riding-cap was a long, white plume.

He had splendid falcons and dogs for pets, and the most beautiful crossbow and arrows in the world.

He had lessons every day, like other boys, but they were made as interesting to him as

possible, and his tutors were the most learned men in the Kingdom. And they always praised him, and listened to what he said respectfully.

He was a bright boy—not so bright as every one believed him, but bright enough to get very tired of being told how wonderful he was all day. He was so well taken care of that he was bored, and he wanted with all his soul to get away from his masters and the courtiers, and be just like any ordinary boy for a little while.

He used to ride soberly and properly along on his silver-shod pony, followed by his devoted retainers, and often he would wish that he dared jump one of the flowering hedges and gallop off into the wild woods all by himself in search of adventures.

Sometimes he would gaze at the Wonderful Mountains, so high and dark against the bright-blue sky, and he would wonder and wonder what was on the other side of them. Of course he had never heard of Hellabrunn nor the Enchanted Forest. But you see, just as the peo-

ple of the Hellabrunn Valley puzzled over what was east of the mountain range, so the folk of the Contented Kingdom puzzled over what was west of it.

The years passed, and the good King and Queen died. The Prince was now ruler of the realm, or would be as soon as he was old enough. His Crown was all of red gold, heavy and shining, and he tried it on once or twice, to see how it felt. He found that it made his head ache, so he made up his mind that, even when he should be King, he would wear it as little as possible. Just the same, the big, golden circlet fascinated him, and he used to look at it often and think and think about what it meant to be a King.

One thing he knew that it meant. He was quite certain to be more bored as a King than he was now as a King's Son. He used to get quite gloomy about it—in his fine, golden Kingdom!

At sixteen the King's Son was tall and strong and handsome. He carried his head proudly, and walked with a swinging step.

One would have had to be very stupid indeed not to see that he was of the blood royal. His eyes were clear and bright, and he looked eager and ready for anything.

Although one could see so plainly that he was a Prince, he did not put on airs. He was far too nice for that, and his manners were too good. He was just a plucky, healthy, well-bred boy, with too much pride and too little patience, and a warm, impetuous heart. You would have liked the King's Son.

In his heart he knew that the existence which he led was not the right one for a boy. If he had been a girl it would have been different. It would have been delightful for a young Princess to have been dressed in silk and jewels, and to have had silver-shod ponies and pretty toys—think how the poor little Goose Girl, for instance, would have loved it! But the King's Son wanted a ruder and less comfortable life. You know what fun it is to go camping, and to work out of doors. The Prince of the Contented Kingdom wanted to do the sort of things that nowadays we call "roughing it!"

Besides, deep down in his heart he hated to feel that every one was devoted to him merely because he was a King's Son. Although, like most boys, he was a little ashamed of caring about such things, he had a great longing to be loved just for himself. He could not help seeing that his page and esquire were popular with other boys, not because they were rich or powerful or born to great names, but because they were merry and brave and kind-hearted, and could do things well. And he wondered if he would be as popular as they, without his fine clothes, and the right to being called "Your Highness."

And day by day his dream grew into a very real desire, and at last he came to his decision—the decision to run away.

Of course we may say that it was wrong of him, that he should not have turned his back on his people and his country, nor give up doing the things that his parents had wished him to do, and that every one expected him to do. But he was already sixteen, and he had been bored all his life.

The young peasants could run races upon the highroad, climb trees, and run away from school to go fishing. But the King's Son had to wear a velvet cloak, and learn the Laws of the Kingdom, and see stupid Ambassadors and Councilors. Really, in spite of his good fortune, his life *was* rather a dull one!

At any rate, he made up his mind that he could not and would not stand it. He would run away, climb the Wonderful Mountains, and find out whether there was anything at all beyond them.

He planned it all out very carefully. He would exchange suits with his favorite esquire, arm himself with a good bow and a quiverful of strong arrows, take a stout staff to help him in his climbing, and go out into the world to seek his fortune!

But he was not very consistent, as you will see. He wanted to stop being a King's Son and start on his travels quite like a common lad; and yet what do you suppose he made up his mind to carry with him? First, his father's Sword, which only the Kings of the

Contented Kingdom had a right to use; and second, the Crown!

Yes! He was determined to take his Crown. He could not have told just why he wanted it with him, but when he got ready to run away he could not bear to leave it behind.

One early morning he dressed himself in the esquire's clothes—a common huntsman's suit, of dull-red cloth, with a little cap such as peasants and serving-folk wore. He slung a rough crossbow and arrow-quiver on his back, and buckled on the King's Sword. Then he took the great golden Crown and tied it up in a handkerchief. This bundle he fastened on to the end of his stick. So he was ready.

He took no money and no food. It was part of his idea that he ought to be able to earn both. A boy worthy to be a King should be able to get along without help on a journey—that was what he said to himself, poor lad! You see, he was brave and strong of heart, our young Prince.

It was very quiet in the Palace. The sun was only just beginning to creep in at the big

windows and paint the stone floor yellow. Every one was sound asleep. Even the dogs lay still in the great hall, and the tame birds dozed on their golden perches.

The Prince's favorite hound lifted his head and wagged his tail. He would have loved to have gone, too, and it nearly broke the boy's heart to leave him behind. But he was afraid that the other dogs would follow their tracks, and besides, willing as he was to risk hardships for himself, he could not bear to think of the hound's being hungry or cold among the mountains. So he left him.

He tiptoed softly out of the hall, through the huge entrance-doors, and down the broad, marble steps.

Outside the morning was fresh and sweet. The birds of the Contented Kingdom were singing in the leaves. The air was very still and full of perfumes.

The King's Son looked his last on the royal Palace, sleeping in the center of the woods and gardens, and then turned his face toward the Wonderful Mountains.

The King's Son

27

So he set forth upon his long, strange journey—a shabby wanderer, in huntsman's array, with a King's Sword and a King's Crown!

THE KING'S SON WHEN HE WAS A PRINCE



THE KING'S SON WHEN HE WAS A HUNTSMAN



CHAPTER III

THE WITCH'S BAKING-DAY

ONE OF THE GOOSE GIRL'S MELODIES



It was midsummer in the clearing by the Witch's Hut.

I wish I could make you see the Hut. It was a queer little old picture-book house, very crooked and weather-beaten, with damp, green moss all over the roof, and such a broken-down chimney that it was a wonder the smoke ever found its way up the twisted flue. But there it was, coming busily out of the top and floating over the trees, showing that it was the Witch's baking-day.

The great, green wood rustled sleepily on all sides.

It was very warm, a real summer afternoon. There was hardly any wind, and the sunshine lay hot and golden on the little shanty and the grassy clearing before it. The Tom Cat was asleep on the roof as usual. The Raven had settled his head between his hunched-up, ruffled, black wings, and closed his eyes. Sometimes, when he went quite to sleep, he would nearly tumble off the ridge-pole, but most of the time he merely drowsed, and croaked in his dreams.

The spring trickled slowly through the wooden trough; even the water seemed sleepy.

The Geese were strolling about, eating the flowers and bulbs in the tiny garden, and doing their best to get lost in the wood, for their little mistress, for once in her life, was neglecting them. The Goose Girl was lying under the linden-tree, singing to herself.

She was not a lazy little girl, as a rule, but it is hard not to dream day-dreams in mid-summer—especially when you live in the heart of an Enchanted Forest.

"Cackle!" said the Geese. "She may dream away now, poor dear! It is little dreaming she will do one of these days, if we know the world! Cackle!"

"Let us eat up that big yellow lily in the garden," suggested a young gosling.

"No," said the Wise Gray One, the oldest goose of all. "That is the Goose Girl's favorite flower."

"Squawk!" they said, and scattered to look for lady-bugs.

"Tra-la-la!" hummed the little Goose Girl, pulling at the flowers and grasses about her.

" 'I wish—that I—
Had a silver spindle—' "

She didn't know any more of the song, so she sang the first bars over and over.

" 'I wish—that I—' "

A harsh voice broke in upon her song and her day-dream.

"You lazy little brat!" growled the Witch, from the window of the Hut. "What are you doing now?"



"I WISH—THAT I—HAD A SILVER SPINDLE!"

"I'm lying in the grass," answered the Goose Girl. "The sun is singing and dancing with me."

The faintly moving branches and leaves made the sunbeams leap about in the merriest manner. The Goose Girl loved to watch them. But any mention of the sun made the Witch crosser than ever. She hated daylight.

"Do you want to feel my stick across your back?" she called, sharply. "Where are your geese?"

The Goose Girl sat up with a start.

"They've probably strayed into the woods and lost themselves," went on the Witch. "And the ones that aren't already in the thickets are in the garden! Of course! Go and chase them this minute!"

The Goose Girl sprang up and obeyed at once.

"Ksch! Ksch!" she called, making the little hushing noise known to all herders of geese. "Ksch! Come here, you waddling things! Ksch! You Old Gray One, you ought to know better! Come out of the garden, or I'll slap you all! Ksch!"

The Witch glared at her through the window. You never saw such a horrible old face. Peering out like that it was enough to give one nightmares.

When the old hag had withdrawn her wicked head the little Goose Girl gathered her flock about her, tenderly smoothed their soft feathers, and begged them not to run away again. "You know," she added, "when you are naughty Grandmother beats *me*."

"Squawk! Cackle! We are sorry," said the Geese.

The door of the Hut opened, and the Witch came out, dressed in the dusty, musty, rusty, horrible gown, and a cap and kerchief more ragged and dirty than anything you have ever seen.

"Come in here!" she snapped, flourishing her crooked cane. "The acorns are ready for the cake."

The Goose Girl looked into the dark hovel.

"Must I go in?" she pleaded, wistfully. "It's so gloomy and horrid indoors—just like night!"

"The hateful sun!" retorted the Witch,

frowning angrily. "How you love it! You are no true Witch Child, in spite of all the trouble I have taken with you. I tell you the dark is beautiful!"

She actually smiled.

"The night!" she muttered, with ghostly glee. "Aha! The night! When the goblin moon whitens the hills and the poison swells in the wild weeds! Aha! But you!" She shook her stick furiously at the Goose Girl. "You love the sun and the summer day. It's no use. All the pains in the world won't make you a Witch Child."

"I'll come," said the little Goose Girl, sadly, and went toward the Hut.

Just at the door she stopped to look at her garden. You never saw such an odd little garden. The Goose Girl had planted it neatly and taken good care of it, but the blossoms were different from those in mortal flower-beds, of strange colors and shapes. She had transplanted them from various parts of the Enchanted Wood.

Among the flowers was a yellow lily, large and beautiful, the little girl's favorite, as the

Gray Goose had said. She called it *her* Flower, and felt as though there were some tie between it and her. But of all the blossoms, big and little, in the garden, it was the only one which would not thrive. It drooped on its green stem, and the pretty petals never would entirely open out.

"Grandmother," said the Goose Girl, "is my pet Flower sick? It has never done well since it began to bud. What's the matter with it?"

"It's a lily," said the Witch, crossly, "so it's stuck up!"

"Every morning when I water my flowers," went on the Goose Girl, "I say a little prayer for it to bloom and grow. But it always looks wilted."

She sighed and went into the house. I wonder how the little Goose Girl knew how to say her prayers. You may be quite certain that the Witch never taught her.

"Bustle now!" snarled the old dame. "Don't be lazy, or you'll be sorry."

The Goose Girl knew that it was baking-day, and that she and her mistress would have to

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make a magical cake. She hated these cooking-lessons, but the Witch would beat her if she disobeyed.

"Bring everything here to the spring," ordered the old woman; and the little maid came out with both arms laden. "Have you the bowl?" demanded the Witch. "And the meal? And the spices?"

The Goose Girl nodded. She had brought a great copper kettle, too, the pot which they always used for mixing the magic dough. She set out bowl and kettle, spoon and meal-sack, the acorns and the spice-jar, and the ground-up, many-colored herbs which the Witch had prepared.

Her mistress watched her, scowling. She could not help seeing how pretty and gentle and graceful the child was, and she hated her for it. As the Goose Girl knelt beside the spring a golden lock slipped out from under the faded red kerchief. She had tried secretly that morning to brush it into a ringlet, and the Witch knew it at once.

"Curling that corn-colored mop of yours!"

she sneered. "Trying to make a beauty of yourself, you ugly, silly wench!"

The Goose Girl was leaning over the edge of the stone basin, scouring the inside of the copper kettle with handfuls of grass and sand. As the Witch spoke she looked up quickly.

"Even my flowers dress themselves in pretty colors and ornament themselves with dew," she said, with just a wee flash of temper. "I wish I were a flower—yes, I do! But, anyway"—she put more sand into the copper pot—"I saw myself in the spring the other day, and I thought I looked—nice."

"*Will* you rinse that kettle?" remarked the Witch, in a dangerous tone. "Or is the spring to be used for nothing but a looking-glass?"

"Grandmother," said the Goose Girl, scouring away at the copper kettle, "how long have you and I lived here alone in the Wood?"

"Nine — ten — eleven years," counted the Geese; but the Goose Girl did not hear them.

"Suppose you talk sense!" said the Witch, angrily. "I've trained you well. I've shown you how to steep simples and make poisons.

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I've taught you spells and explained to you charms and magic passes. But you never seem to learn! You dream dreams, and ask silly questions. Your wits are always wool-gathering. Now to-day we have a piece of fine Witch Work to be done. Pay attention!"

The Goose Girl shivered. She hated the Witch's magic. It was black and wicked, and nearly always was intended to hurt some one sooner or later. I wonder how she would have felt if she could have foreseen the important part this day's baking was to play in her own future!

"You must not sing nor laugh, now," said the Witch, in a hollow tone. "It is a spell!"

"Our little mistress looks sad enough," said the Geese. "Cackle! There is a pink caterpillar! Squawk!"

The Witch waved her crooked stick and gave directions with a mysterious air, and the Goose Girl knelt beside the spring and mixed the Magic Cake.

"Pour water into the meal!" muttered the Witch. "Mix it carefully! Now your spice-

box and powdered herbs: first a grain of red, then a grain of black. Now knead the dough into a nice, plump loaf."

The little Goose Girl kneaded until her arms ached, and as she kneaded her brain was busy.

"Grandmother," she said, timidly, "I—I don't believe that you have ever been very fond of me."

The Witch gave a start and stared at her.

"During the summer," proceeded the little Goose Girl, gathering courage, "you have not much need of me. I wish—I wish—oh, Grandmother!" she burst out, "let me go down to the Valley where the Mortal People live!"

She looked pleadingly at the Witch, then began to knead the dough harder than ever.

"They must be so beautiful, and so friendly," faltered the little Goose Girl, almost in tears. "I do so want to see them! Even you, Grandmother, come home cheerful when you have been among them. You must like them."

"I hate them!" muttered the Witch. "But I like their gold. It's only their money that takes me into their stuffy, crooked streets. And as for them, they are afraid of me."

She gave a horrible chuckle.

"No one could be afraid of me," said the little Goose Girl, as she kneaded the dough. "Let me go down and see them just once."

"Have a care!" cried the Witch, with a terrible look. "Every tree and shrub in the Enchanted Wood is rooted in magic. They hold you here in my power. If you try to get away the earth will scorch you. Only try, and you will see!"

She raised her stick and pointed to the dark wood.

"Do you want to go?" she said, mockingly.

"Oh, dear!" said the Goose Girl, with the tears running down her cheeks. "What I could do, I may not; and what I may do, I can't. There's your dough."

She had finished kneading, and raised the plump, white loaf from the copper pot. The Witch liked her to try her hand at spells and charms, so she waved the dough three times in the air and chanted:

"Who eats this Cake sees his love so true;
Who eats this Cake shall have his dream come true!"

Then she gave the dough to the Witch.

"H'm!" said that pleasant old lady. "You haven't much idea of what you've been making, to say *that* charm over it!"

She looked darkly at the loaf she held, and murmured:

"It will never grow hard, never grow stale, through the long years.

"The magic which made it will weaken never;
Who eats of this Cake shall sleep forever!"

"But my spell!" cried the Goose Girl. "What of that?"

The Witch laughed. "It's a nice mess of poison, my child," she said. "Poison that will not spoil. Aha!"

And she went into the Hut to bake the Cake.

"Grandmother, don't!" wailed the Goose Girl, thinking of the poor unfortunate, whoever he might be, who was to eat it.

"Stop screaming!" said the Witch.

She was out in a moment, carrying her big basket.

"I'm going down to the Black Marsh to hunt," she said, brusquely. "It rained last

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night, and there will be plenty of snails and worms and slimy green lizards!"

She aimed a blow at the flock of Geese with her stick, and hobbled briskly off into the Forest.

"Rudel!" said the Wise Gray One.

"Squawk!" agreed the others.

The Goose Girl drew a long breath of relief.

"All alone!" she whispered.

She got her wreath and put it on, and then went to sit on the edge of the basin once more. Then she looked dreamily at her reflection.

"I wonder if I am really pretty?" she asked herself.

"Yes—yes—yes!" hissed the Geese, softly.

There was a faint sound of crashing twigs somewhere near in the Wood. The little Goose Girl started up in alarm.

"Was that Grandmother?" she exclaimed, aloud.

Silence again.

"The wind in the branches," she said, and seated herself.

"I doubt it—cackle, cackle!" said the Wise Gray Goose.

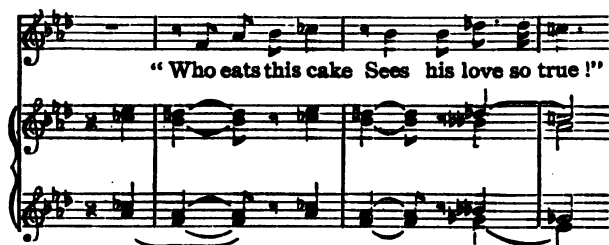
The Goose Girl sat on the mossy stones and looked into the spring. All was very still. The Enchanted Forest held its breath. The Tom Cat and the Raven opened their eyes. They knew something was going to happen.

A sound again. There was no question about it this time. It was a step.

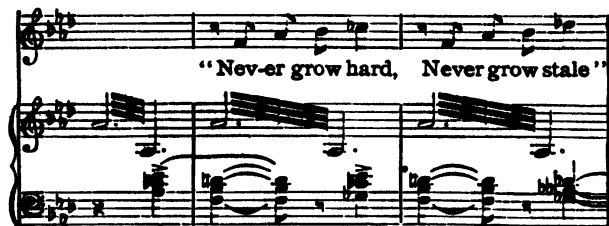
She sprang to her feet and turned to look.

There was a stranger in the clearing!

THIS IS WHAT THE GOOSE GIRLS SANG OVER THE MAGIC CAKE



AND THIS IS WHAT THE WITCH CHANTED



CHAPTER IV

THE WREATH AND THE CROWN

WHEN THE KING'S SON ASKED THE GOOSE GIRL TO
BE HIS LITTLE LADY



THE stranger bowed to her politely and lifted his cap.

He was a lad a little older than herself, straight and strongly built, and tanned to bronze by the hard weather he had met. His eyes were bright and fearless, and he bore himself gracefully and easily. His huntsman's suit of dull-red cloth was torn by brambles and stained by rain, but the Goose Girl thought him very handsome; and indeed he was. As

you have guessed by this time, he was no other than the King's Son.

The Goose Girl stood and stared at him, and he could not help smiling at her bewildered face. He glanced from her to the Geese and back again.

"Good-day to you, pretty Goose Queen," he said, merrily, his cap in hand. "Why do you look at me like that? Come, little Wood Maiden, haven't you a friendly word for a wanderer?"

The Goose Girl drew a long breath, then found her voice.

"Are you a Mortal?" she said.

The King's Son threw back his head and laughed.

"From head to foot," he declared.

The Goose Girl stared harder than ever.

"No one ever came here before," she explained. "You are the first person I have ever seen, and I don't know what to say to you."

It was his turn to stare.

"Are you sure you aren't telling stories?" he asked, smiling but not believing. "You

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must be twelve or thirteen—almost grown up—and you tell me you've never seen any one before?"

"No one ever comes to the Magic Wood," said the Goose Girl, simply. "*Nothing* comes—nothing except sunshine in summer and snowstorms in winter."

"But aren't you lonely?" he said, looking at her pityingly. "Haven't you any one to play with?"

"Grandmother is very old," said the Goose Girl. "She likes to live here alone. But she has seen the Mortal People—down in the Valley. Is that where you come from?" she added, eagerly.

The King's Son shook his head, and pointed up to the mountain-tops above them.

"No," he said. "I come from a great distance, beyond the ridge. I've traveled for days and nights."

"What did you have to eat?" asked the Goose Girl.

"Roots!" he said, and laughed.

"And what did you drink?"

"Dew!"

"But what did you sleep on?" she cried.

"Sharp stones!" he retorted, gaily. "And look at the rags I'm in!"

The King's Son had had plenty of "roughing it" at last, on his long journey over the Wonderful Mountains. The sun had scorched him, and the keen east wind had chilled him. He had rested on the hard ground, and trudged so many miles each day that his hunting-shoes were nearly worn out. In his luxurious Contented Kingdom he had longed to test his strength and his spirit, and now his courtiers would hardly have recognized him, with his brown face and tattered doublet.

The little Goose Girl was looking with wondering eyes at what hung at his side. She seemed to know by instinct what it was.

"Is that a sword?" she asked.

"Yes," he said; "but it isn't worth much yet. It hasn't even a name."

And he looked down at it, and shook his head with a sigh.

You know, in those days men gave their

swords fine-sounding names when they had done great deeds with them—won battles, or rescued people in distress, or killed dragons. You remember King Arthur's sword, Excalibur, and Siegfried's Needful. The King's Son had a dream of making his sword equally renowned by some splendid fighting, one of these days. That was why he looked so wistfully at the noble old blade, which still went by the simple title of the King's Sword. But after all I think that is rather a fine name for a sword, don't you?

The Goose Girl looked up very gravely.

"And are you brave?" she asked.

The question rather astonished the King's Son. He had been brought up to think that only persons of high birth thought about courage and those fine, heroic things. His courtiers had told him that peasants were cowards, and he could not altogether get the idea out of his mind that bravery and royalty went together. And, of course, they should go together. One must be brave to be truly royal; but then, too, one cannot help being a little royal if one is truly brave.

"And are you brave?" said the Goose Girl.

"You said that just as my Lady Mother might have said it," he said, wonderingly.

"Squawk!" said the Geese, indignantly. "And why shouldn't she?"

"Our little mistress is as good as *anybody's* Lady Mother," said the Wise Gray Goose.

The sun seemed to be hotter than ever. You know how breathless it gets on summer afternoons, just before the shadows lengthen and the twilight breeze rises. The King's Son threw his cap on the grass and pushed his hair back from his forehead.

"The sun burns one up," he exclaimed. "Could I have a drink of spring-water, please?"

The Goose Girl showed him how she drank when she was thirsty. Sitting on the stone ledge of the basin, she would lean over and hold up her face under the spout of the wooden trough, so that the water would run into her mouth. The King's Son now did the same.

"How good it is!" he cried, gratefully—this young Prince who but a short time before had

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been drinking all sorts of delicious things from jeweled cups!

"Don't you want to rest a little while?" asked the Goose Girl, shyly.

The King's Son admitted that he was tired and hot. He sat down under the linden-tree on the soft, flower-covered bank.

"Please sit down, too!" he begged. And she settled herself on the grass beside him.

"Cackle! Squawk! What nice-looking children they are!" said the Wise Gray Goose, proudly.

"Yes!" hissed all the others.

As the King's Son sat on the bank with the Goose Girl he suddenly thought of the dandified courtiers at home, who were accustomed to stand about respectfully when he took his seat. Times had certainly changed! He laughed to himself and murmured half aloud, "If they could only see me now!"

It was sweet and cool in the shade of the linden-tree. He drew a deep breath and stretched himself out on the fresh grass.

"Where do you come from?" demanded the

Goose Girl, who, you see, was a direct little person and did not waste words. The King's Son liked her the better for this frank and simple manner, and he thought her wonderfully sweet and gentle, and pretty, too.

The King's Son saw that she was honestly anxious to hear more about him, and it pleased him. No one had ever before been interested in him for himself.

"I am a huntsman," he told her. "I come from a beautiful country which lies behind the mountains. There I—there I served the King."

He spoke with hesitation. He did not want to tell her that he was a Prince. But rank meant nothing to the Goose Girl.

"What's a King?" said she.

The King's Son did not know what to say. He looked at her hard to be sure that she was not joking. She was quite serious, as he saw.

"Well," he said, slowly, "that isn't very easy to explain. Let's see. Well, how do you take care of your Geese?"

"I keep them from running away," answered the Goose Girl, promptly. "And I warn them

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out of the garden. And when they are very bad I slap them."

"That's the idea!" cried the King's Son. "You sit on a bank, and the King sits on a throne; that's the chief difference. You watch geese, and he watches people. He rewards the good ones and slaps the bad." The Prince laughed at the likeness between a sovereign and a goose-herder. Then he went on more seriously, "And when he does his work properly, and is a true King, every one is glad to do what he says."

Something in his voice made the Goose Girl glance at him. And then she leaned forward, and said, quietly:

"Are you a King?"

"No," said the boy. "I am too young to be a King yet. A King has to have a long beard and a grave face, and I haven't either. I—I am a King's Son," he finished, awkwardly.

Of course the Goose Girl wanted to know all about him, and everything that had ever happened to him, just as you would. At first he did not like to speak about himself, but he be-

gan to talk, and he talked more and more as he found how she loved to listen.

The King's Son told her about his childhood in the Contented Kingdom. He told her of his ponies and his dogs, and his birds, and the sports and games planned to amuse him, and the beautiful things that he had owned. And he told her, too, of how this splendor had wearied him—of how he had longed for freedom and for adventures.

And the Goose Girl listened spellbound, for it was more interesting to her than the most delightful fairy tale could be to you or me. The life of Kings and Princesses seemed to her too strange and marvelous to possibly be true. And yet she knew that she could believe everything he told her, however remarkable it might seem. There could be no question about trusting the King's Son. He was as honest and sunny as the daylight, and he had never told a lie in his life.

"Cackle! Squawk!" chattered the Geese to one another, as they paddled in the mud near the overflowing spring. "If we don't take care

he will take our little mistress away and make a Queen of her."

"But she is nothing but a Goose Girl," objected the young Gosling.

"Cackle! What does that matter?" said the Wise Gray One. "Squawk!"

The little girl who sat with him on the green bank under the linden-tree was the first real friend the King's Son had ever had. She liked to talk to him, and to hear what had happened to him, not because he was a royal person to whom she must curtsey, but because he was a nice boy, and had something interesting to tell.

He told her the story of his flight from the Palace and the Contented Kingdom. She listened breathlessly with eyes as big and round as saucers.

The sun began to get a trifle less hot, and a light wind arose. The linden-tree rustled softly, and the flowers seemed to freshen as the shadows gathered.

"Squawk!" said the Geese, uneasily. "One does not like all this talk of running away. He

must not make her discontented with the clearing. She mustn't go away!"

"No!" said the Tom Cat and the Raven, speaking together. "She must never go away!"

The Prince told the Goose Girl of his journey across the Wonderful Mountains. He had had to fight bears and wolves, and climb dangerous crags, and wade through rushing torrents. He had been badly hurt more than once—he still had scars to show. But he knew that he was the better for his adventures.

"I was hungry and thirsty," he said. "I was dead tired, and my feet ached, and my wounds hurt, too. But I hardened my muscles!" He laughed triumphantly. "And now, when I start out at dawn every morning I feel a thousand times more a King's Son than I ever felt in the Palace!"

The little Goose Girl sat in a dream of wonder. She thought of her own miserable life with the Witch, and she sighed.

"How I wish I could go with you!" she exclaimed.

"Are you as brave as all that?" he said, laughing.

"I am not brave at all," said the Goose Girl. "But I should like to run away from here with you and have adventures. You would take care of me."

"I don't see why you shouldn't," said the King's Son, seriously, and he thought the matter over for a moment or two.

"You know," he said at last, "every Knight when he goes wandering about with his sword in hand"—he felt very important and heroic when he said this—"serves a lady and carries her colors."

The little Goose Girl did not understand, so he explained: "You see, a Knight has to have a lady to fight for and to keep brave and true for—some one who will be glad when he wins and sorry when he loses, some one he can tell things to, and who will be his own particular Lady. Do you see?"

The Goose Girl could see.

"Well, then," said the King's Son, practically, "I think you would better be my little

Lady. To be sure you are not very old yet, but you are prettier and sweeter than any of the Court Ladies in my Kingdom, and when we both grow up I will marry you—that is, if you think it is a good idea.”

The Goose Girl said she did, and the King's Son kissed her, and so *that* was settled.

“But oh, dear!” cried the little Goose Girl. “There goes my wreath! The wind has blown it away! Oh, catch it!”

The King's Son sprang after the wreath and caught it as the wind whirled it about.

“I have it!” he exclaimed.

“But you've broken it!” she said, ready to cry. “My pretty wreath! It was the only nice thing I had to wear.”

The King's Son had torn the wreath in two in trying to rescue it from the wind. He felt very sorry, for she seemed to be grieving over its loss. Of course she could make another, but she liked this one.

“I'll tell you!” cried the King's Son. “A Knight has to carry his Lady's colors or her

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token. Usually she gives him a ribbon or a scarf or something—”

The Goose Girl looked sadder. She had none of these things.

“But you,” went on the boy, quickly, “shall give me this wreath instead. I’ll keep it always—and when I go into battle,” he added, grandly, “it will bring me luck.”

He tucked the broken wreath inside his doublet. “Now I am a regular Knight, and you have given me your token to wear, like a real Knight’s Lady.”

The little Goose Girl smiled, but he could still see two tears trembling in her eyes. You see, she was very young for her age, and she had so few pleasures and no pretty things at all.

Suddenly a thought struck him, a really wonderful thought. He had told the little Goose Girl that when they grew up they would be married; why, that would make her Queen! For the first time he began seriously to consider going back to the Contented Kingdom. It would be such fun to make the wise old courtiers do homage to this dear little girl.

But she would not be a little girl then, she would be a young maiden, fair and slender, like a story-book lady. And he would have to grow a long beard, and be dignified and royal. No; he was not sure, after all, that he could bear to go back and be a King. But, anyway, the little maid should have—his Crown.

You see, that was the wonderful idea; he would give the Goose Girl his Crown to wear instead of her wreath which he had broken.

He hastily untied the handkerchief on his stick and took out the Crown. It was as bright and splendid as ever. The Goose Girl had not known that there were things so brilliant in the world.

"A Queen was intended to wear this, I suppose," said the King's Son, "but a Goose Girl will do just as well. I think she would make a very *nice* Queen." And he made her a little bow. "This is in exchange for your pretty wreath. You let me keep that, so I give you my Crown."

He held it out to her. But the Goose Girl would not take it.

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"It isn't mine," she said. "I'd rather not wear it, please. It—it would hurt my forehead, I am sure."

The King's Son was a self-willed lad, as you have seen long ago. He had a very quick temper, and he did a great many hasty and foolish things before he had time to think. He was a little angry with the Goose Girl for refusing his Crown, but at the same time he rather admired her for it. So he acted on a sudden impulse and fired the big, red-gold circlet into the bushes.

"All right," he said. "Let it rust there, if you don't want it. *I* certainly don't! That settles my royal rank!" And he laughed. "Now I've no title to bother me, and no Crown to carry. I've nothing to my name but a sword, and whatever good or bad qualities I happen to have been born with. Now, do you want me to help you to run away or not?"

"Oh, indeed—indeed I do!" cried the little Goose Girl. "Let us slip away together at once."

They caught hands and started to run.

Suddenly, at the very edge of the clearing, the
Goose Girl gave a cry and stopped short.

THE SPELL THAT STOPPED THE GOOSE GIRL



CHAPTER V

THE SPELL

THE MOANING MUSIC IN THE WOOD



"WHAT is the matter?" cried the King's Son.

The little Goose Girl was standing stock still, staring straight before her with wide, frightened eyes. She had dropped his hand. For the

moment she seemed to have forgotten him altogether.

"What are you looking at?" demanded the boy, a trifle impatiently. "Nothing is wrong! Why do you stand there like that?"

She still gazed ahead so intently that he turned to see if any one else were in sight. No, there was no one in the clearing. Everything was just as it had been before. . . . Or stay! Was it just the same, after all?

The bushes and trees seemed to be clustered more thickly together than when he had broken his way through them. The branches seemed very low, and very tightly interlaced. How many trees there were, to be sure! And how dark it looked beneath them!

For some reason the King's Son felt odd and creepy. He felt, in fact, as though some one had been telling ghost stories. Something was wrong. But he had no idea what it was, which made it much worse.

"Look at the Forest!" gasped the Goose Girl.
"It won't let me go!"

The King's Son started to tell her that all

that sort of thing was nonsense, but the words died on his lips. Before his very eyes the boughs seemed to become still more densely interlaced. A wild, sudden wind had risen, and the grass was flattened and whitened under it. A strange, moaning noise came from the Enchanted Wood—a faint, shrill wail quite different from the sound of human voices.

On the ridge-pole of the Witch's house the Raven fluttered back and forth in a frenzy. The Cat sat straight up, wide awake enough now, his wicked eyes blazing.

"Come quick! S-s-s-sss!" hissed the Geese. "Something is happening! Gather around our little mistress-s-sss!"

"My Geese know! My Geese understand! See, they will not leave me!" cried the Goose Girl. "And look at the Raven! Oh, what shall I do? I am turning to stone!"

"It—it's some sort of magic working on you," stammered the King's Son, finding his throat very dry and lumpy, but trying to speak carelessly. "We must fight it! Come on! You won't give in to it, surely Goose Girl?"

The little girl tried to take a step forward, and broke into despairing tears.

"I can't!" she sobbed. "The ground holds on to me! The earth is growing to the soles of my feet. I can't go! I can't go!"

The King's Son had no experience with Magic. He could see quite well that the Goose Girl was under some charm, but he could not actually feel it himself. So, being by nature impatient, he began to get rather cross. He could not understand letting a little thing like a spell interfere with what one really wanted to do. Of course, said he to himself, the Goose Girl could get away from the Witch's magic perfectly well if she only tried hard enough.

"Are you not going to keep your promise about running away?" he asked. "Do you mean to tell me that a few trees, and a cat, and a raven can keep you here against your will? And do you care more for your flock of geese than you do for me, and the other mortals you were going to see out in the world?"

"I can't help it!" whispered the Goose Girl. "I can't help it. . . . And I am frightened!"

"This is not the time to be frightened!" exclaimed the King's Son, indignantly. "And, anyway, it's shameful to be afraid. Nice people are never afraid!"

Then, as the Goose Girl did not answer, but merely stood still and sobbed and trembled, he lost his temper entirely.

"Run away, indeed!" he exclaimed, scornfully. "You would make a splendid runaway! You have just about as much spirit as one could expect from a—peasant wench!"

The little Goose Girl shrank away from him when he said that, for he had hurt her very much. She stopped crying and looked at him sorrowfully and reproachfully.

"Then go, King," she said, in a low voice. "I do not think you are a true King."

And not another word would she say.

Now the King's Son was utterly wretched because of what he had said. He knew that he had been wrong, and not at all kingly. He had spoken like a bad, rude, ill-bred little boy instead of a young Prince, and he knew it. And, because he felt ashamed, he grew angrier

than ever. So he went storming on, making himself more miserable every moment.

"I should not have tried to help you, anyway!" he cried. "Kings and beggars can't be friends; it was silly to try it. I gave you my Crown, and I'm sorry that I did. But you may keep it to remind you of me, for you'll not see me again. I'm going far away, farther and faster than any falcon ever flew. And you may expect to see me when—when—when a star falls out of the sky into that lily there."

And the King's Son dashed blindly into the Enchanted Forest.

The spell did not hinder *him*. Indeed, as soon as his crashing steps through the underbrush had died away the Raven ceased fluttering, the wind grew calm, and the branches seemed to straighten and dwindle and become as usual. The Tom Cat settled down once more, and the Goose Girl found that she could move about with no further trouble.

Only the faint, sighing sound still drifted from the depths of the Enchanted Wood, as

though magic forces of some sort were yet abroad and ready for mischief.

When the little Goose Girl realized that she was again alone she flung herself on the grass, and cried as though her heart would break. The King's Son had been so gentle at first! He had spoken to her the first really kind words that she could remember hearing in all her fourteen years. And his stories had been so interesting, even more exciting than the wonderful dreams which the Dream Fairies used to bring her at night in her tiny room in the Witch's Hut. And then, too, the thought of getting away from the Witch and the lonely life in the clearing, the chance of seeing Mortals, and doing the things that other children did, the hope of being a little gay and care-free at last—oh! It had all looked to her so lovely—so impossibly beautiful! Yes! It had been *impossibly* beautiful! So much happiness could not be for her. She could never get away from the cruel Witch and the dreary Hut. She must stay here always and mix magic cakes and take care of the Geese.

So she lay on the grass and cried, and wished that the King's Son had never come to the clearing at all. It would not be half so bad, she thought, if she had never had a hope of getting away. It was the disappointment which made it so dreadfully hard.

And she was a little disappointed in the King's Son, too, though she was too loyal and loving to confess it. She remembered what he had said about her having the spirit of a peasant wench. She knew that royal people were all supposed to be brave, and that she was a coward. But it had seemed rather hard to be told so.

"I wish that I were a King's Child, too," said the little Goose Girl.

The sun was low now. It would soon be a lovely summer evening, but the Goose Girl was not in a mood to appreciate it. She only wanted to lie on the grass and cry.

Suddenly, quite far off still, she heard the Witch's voice:

"Hey! You little brat, come and help me carry my basket!"

The Goose Girl sprang to her feet, choked down her sobs, and wiped away the tears.

"It is Grandmother coming home," she whispered. "Oh! She mustn't know anything about it!"

A sunbeam caught the golden Crown as it lay in the bushes where the King's Son had flung it. It shone like fire.

The Goose Girl was in a panic. What should she do with it? She did not dare leave it where it was, and she could not think of a safe hiding-place. The Witch had eagle eyes, and seemed to be able to see through the back of her head as well as the front. Perhaps she really could! And if she ever did find where it was hidden she would first beat the Goose Girl and then steal the Crown.

Already the old hag was nearing the glade. The girl could hear her stick tapping the stones and crunching the dead leaves and twigs. She kept up a constant grumbling and muttering, too.

The Goose Girl looked to the right and to the left. And suddenly an idea struck her.

She ran to the bushes and caught up the Crown; then she cried, "Ksch! Ksch!" under her breath, and her Geese came flocking.

Kneeling down she hung the Crown around the neck of the Wise Gray Goose.

"Oh, Gray One, Wise One!" she exclaimed, softly. "Take this away and keep it safe! Hide it, dear Gray Goose, where no hand can find it. No one must touch this circle of gold."

"Certainly not," said the Wise Gray Goose, very importantly, and she waddled away with much dignity.

The other Geese hissed jealously as they watched her carry the circlet off into the dark shrubbery. They knew that the Gray Goose would put on airs for a month after the great compliment which their mistress had paid her.

"She may be very wise-wis-s-s-se! And she may have lots-s-s of brains-s-s-sss!" said they, sounding their S's angrily. "But our Mis-s-stress-ss might jus-s-st as-s well have trus-s-s-sted us-s-s-sss!"

The Wise Gray Goose had no sooner disappeared from sight than the Witch came hob-

bling out of the dark wood. She had had fine sport, and her big basket was well filled, so she should have been in good spirits. But she was annoyed with the Goose Girl for not running to meet her. She had counted on making her carry the heavy basket over the last and roughest bit of the path up from the Black Marsh.

She came into the clearing and slammed down the basket mumbling threats of punishment.

"What's the matter with you?" she demanded, sharply. "Didn't you hear me call you?"

Then, even in the fading light, she saw that the Goose Girl did not look quite the same as usual.

"Why are you holding your hand to your forehead?" said the Witch, peering at her keenly under bushy, scowling brows. "Slave that you are!" she grunted. "What's the matter with you, anyway? Eh?"

The Goose Girl did not speak.

"Why are your cheeks so pale?" asked the Witch, coming closer to her.

The Goose Girl had always hated the very idea of lying; but she was afraid that if she told the truth now the Witch might harm the King's Son in some way. So she answered, in very faltering tones:

"I—I have just bathed them—in—in the cool water—"

"Fool! That does not make you pale!"

The Witch was now near enough to see the tear-stains on the Goose Girl's face.

"What has made your eyes and mouth so red?" she demanded.

"I've been eating—red—berries!" said the poor little Goose Girl.

"And putting them in your eyes? Lying idiot!"

The Witch caught hold of the Goose Girl's shoulder and put her ear down against her breast.

"What's the matter with your heart?" she growled. "Pounding one moment, and then stopping altogether!"

The Goose Girl stood trembling and silent for a second; then she could bear it no longer.

"Grandmother — Grandmother!" she cried.
 "It is—I have seen a Mortal."

The Witch gave her a quick push, and then stood back to glare at her.

"A Mortal! Here! Are you mad? Have you been asleep and dreaming?"

The Goose Girl shook her head dumbly. The Witch saw that something important must indeed have happened. Some one—a human being—must have been in the clearing, impossible as it sounded.

"A Mortal!" she repeated. "Where did he come from? By what path? Was he from the Valley? From Hellabrunn?"

"No," said the Goose Girl. "He came over the Wonderful Mountains."

"Nonsense!" said the Witch. "No Mortal ever crossed them yet. But wherever he came from, you'll see him no more. That I can tell you!"

The Goose Girl drooped her head. She knew that well enough already.

"If any other stupid knaves of Mortals come blundering this way," went on the Witch,

getting crosser every minute, "I'll keep you locked up in your bedroom—that I will! And if you dare to peep — — —!"

She shook her stick at the little maid.

"Grandmother!" cried the Goose Girl, pleadingly. "I cannot stay here any longer! Truly I can't! Let me go—please, Grandmother, let me go! I shall die if I stay!"

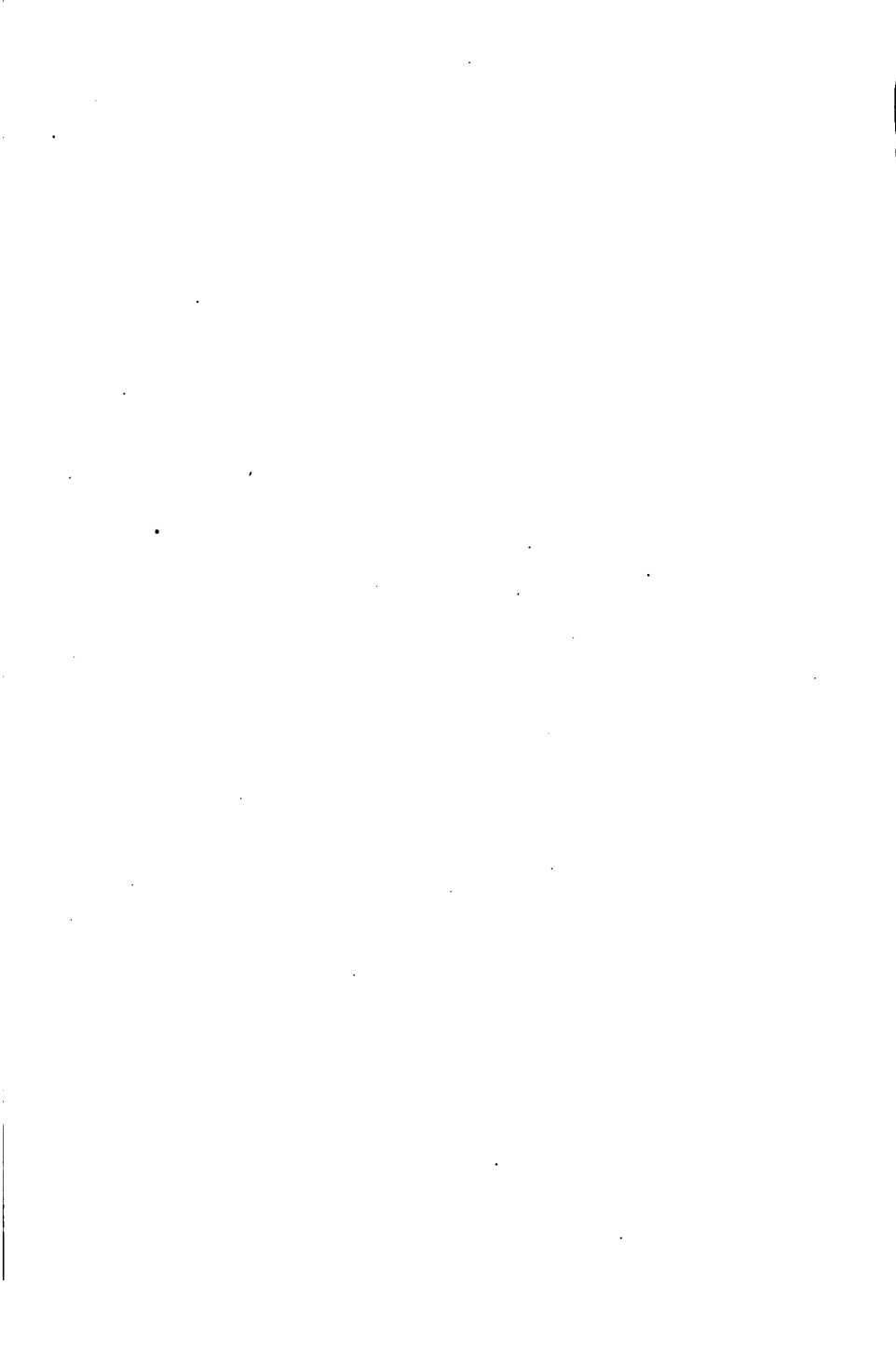
"So that's it!" said the Witch, in a towering fury. "Running away, eh? Getting some interfering rogue of a Mortal to help you slip out of my power? Only wait! I'll take double and triple care of you after this. Run away, would you? You little brat, I'll see that you *never* leave the Enchanted Wood!"

The Yellow Cat blinked his evil eyes and the Raven lifted his clipped wings and croaked—just to show that they were both on the Witch's side. Only the Geese cackled sadly together. They loved the little Goose Girl, and did not like to see her unhappy.

"I'll give you a beating for this!" screamed the old hag, shaking with anger. "You idle, disobedient, ungrateful—"



THE WITCH DROPPED HER STICK, FROWNING



"Oh, Grandmother!" cried the little Goose Girl, with a sob.

The Witch raised her stick above her head. Suddenly she stopped to listen.

A man was singing somewhere in the wood.

The Goose Girl's heart leaped joyfully. Could it be the King's Son coming back after all? No; this was not a boy's voice, but a man's—a strong, full, deep voice—that boomed and echoed like a splendid, big bell.

The Witch dropped her stick, frowning.

And this was the exceedingly queer song that he sang:

**"Three madmen sallied forth
 To hunt for Chanticler's egg!
 One was deaf, another was blind,
 And the third had only one leg!
 Hey! Ho! Heigh!
 How fine it is to be wise, say I,
 And to hunt for Chanticler's egg!
 Heigh! Heigh!
 Folderol-di!
 Let's hunt for Chanticler's egg!"**

THE SONG IN THE WOOD



“Three madmen sallied forth, To hunt for Chanticleer’s egg

CHAPTER VI

THE MORTALS IN THE WOOD

WHEN THE MORTALS CAME TO THE CLEARING



As the song died away among the trees the Witch stamped her foot and wrathfully whacked the ground with her stick.

"*More* Mortals in the wood!" she snarled. "The Enchanted Forest might as well be the grounds of a County Fair! A plague on every bone in their bodies. I wish the whole lot of them were stewing in my big pot! Gr-r-rr!"

She actually growled with rage and disgust.

"Here!" she snapped, seizing her basket and giving it to the Goose Girl. "Take that and

get inside. Shut and bolt the door. Those hateful Mortal People! May they all choke!"

Snorting and grumbling, she pushed the Goose Girl before her, and they entered the Hut. The door was soon carefully fastened, and no one was left in the clearing but the Cat, the Raven, and the Geese.

The Witch's shutters were tightly closed. There was no more smoke coming out of the chimney. One would have said that not a soul lived there.

The Geese wandered off into the thickets, and the Cat and the Raven were quiet on the roof.

Suddenly into the clearing walked three people—three live, healthy, mortal men.

And now we must go back a little so that you may understand clearly who the three men were.

The Hella country, of which the town of Hellabrunn was the Capital, had been for many years without a King. The old monarch who had ruled over it long before had been an extremely wise and good man, but very strict.

He had made many excellent laws, and severely punished any one who broke them. So, though he was much respected and did a great deal for the Kingdom, the people got rather tired of his reign.

When he died the burghers of Hellabrunn did not feel very anxious to have a new King immediately. It really did not seem necessary.

They had a splendid board of Town Councilors, who were entirely able to take care of the people's interests. The burghers were law-keeping citizens, and their country was at peace with others lands. They had plenty of money, and really needed nothing which a King could give them.

So, for a long time, Hellabrunn was "a law unto itself," as the saying is. They grew grain, and plied their trades, and coined gold. All the City cellars were stocked with corn, and red wine, and all sorts of good things. There were no beggars, and even quite common folk dressed in fine clothes. It was all very prosperous and comfortable.

But in time the people began to feel that

they would like to have a King after all. Small quarrels and jealousies arose, and some one was needed to set things right. Strangers told them that it was silly and unfashionable to have an empty Throne. Then, too, without a King they could not have a Court, and the burghers' wives and daughters thought it would be nice to be presented at Court.

Rich and poor, high and low, the people began to be discontented. Hellabrunn wanted a King, and did not know where to look for one.

A meeting of the Town Council was called, and every one agreed that a ruler must be had. They had no idea of giving up their own way, of course! They only wanted their King as a sort of luxury. They thought it would be convenient and pleasant to have him do kind things for them. They had not the slightest intention of obeying his commands if they did not happen to like them. You see, they did not want a real King, after all.

But they thought they did. And they decided to send to their neighbor, the Witch, and ask her advice.

They picked out three messengers to represent the people of Hellabrunn, and promised them many gold-pieces if they returned safe and successful from their journey. These three men were sent clambering up the rocky mountainside, through the dangers of the Enchanted Forest, to visit the Wise Woman of the Wood. They were to ask for a prophecy as to who should be the future King of the Hella Kingdom.

One of the three was a Wood-cutter, a sly, greedy, and cruel man. One was a Broom-maker, who was silly and timid, and as cold-hearted as a fish. And the third was a Fiddler.

The Fiddler was a wonderful person. He was a strolling singer and player, a sort of jongleur. You know, the wandering musicians of the olden days were called troubadours and jongleurs. The troubadours were those who went from one Court to another amusing the great lords and ladies; the jongleurs were simpler folk, who tramped along the highroads, played for the village dances, and sang songs for the peasants and the townspeople.

Our Fiddler carried his queer old violin, or

gigue, as they called it, wherever he went. He played and danced and made strange little songs and stories to amuse himself and other people; and he was loved by every child in Hellabrunn. He was generous and gay, and kind, and good, and so much nicer than most of the grown-up folk in the Town that *they* did not like him much. But the young people thought him a dear and charming person—as he was!

And when he came fiddling down the quaint little old streets in the sunshine the children would rush out of the houses by the dozen, and go dancing with him wherever he went. They called him "Our Fiddler," and loved him dearly, and he loved them just as well, and was never tired of making little tunes for them, and little tales, and little songs. And he could make big songs, too—strange, beautiful melodies and wonderful words that made one cry to hear. But these songs he sang and played very seldom, and almost always when he was alone. A faint, ghostly air would float through the darkened streets at night, and some one,

chancing to hear, would whisper, "It is the Fiddler playing to himself under the stars."

The Broom-maker had thirteen children, and every one of them adored the Fiddler, and would follow him everywhere.

On the long, difficult journey to the Witch's Hut it was the Fiddler who led the way, springing over stones and fallen logs in the merriest manner possible, and singing at the top of his voice to keep up the courage of the others. The Broom-maker and the Wood-cutter were cowards, and as soon as they found themselves in the dreaded Forest they became so nervous that they could hardly keep their feet. And the mischievous Wood played tricks on them, for spirits of magic hate people who are afraid, and so they found twice as many difficulties as the Fiddler.

"Come!" he would cry. "Here is smooth going at last!"

And his long legs would stride over the ground with no trouble at all. But by the time that the Wood-cutter and the Broom-maker had caught up with him a bothersome

stump would have planted itself in front of them, or a sly rock would have fallen directly in their path. And they saw, or fancied they saw, several mysterious shapes disappearing among the trees, and heard strange and terrifying noises.

If the Fiddler saw or heard anything unusual or different from what one meets in an ordinary forest we may be sure that it was not something dreadful, but something pleasant—a little elf, perhaps, nodding from the bell of a columbine; or a pretty princess riding through a green grove. Of course, one could not wander through an Enchanted Forest all a summer afternoon without finding a few surprises. But if one is the Fairies' friend one need have nothing to fear. The right kind of elves like the right kind of mortals, and delight in giving them charming glimpses of themselves and their doings.

So, while the Broom-maker and the Woodcutter were shivering and stumbling among all sorts of goblin-like trees and paths that seemed to wriggle as though they were live things, the

Fiddler was having a delightful time. Who knows how many of the Wood People complimented his singing as he strode along?

"Heigh! Heigh!

Folderol-di!

We'll hunt for Chanticler's egg!"

sang he. And with that they found themselves out of the thick, crowding trees at last, and able to look about them and take breath.

"There, Brother Wood-cutter and Brother Broom-maker!" said the Fiddler, with a wave of his gigue, which he carried in his hand. "Here we are at our journey's end. Behold it!" He pointed to the miserable, silent little Hut. "There it stands—the grand, imposing, magnificent Castle of the Witch!"

He broke into hearty laughter.

"I wish she would poison herself with her own weeds!" grumbled the Wood-cutter, rubbing his shins. "I've never seen such a path—sharp stones, and gnarled roots, and hardly space to stand upright!"

"Dear brother," said the Broom-maker, timidly, "don't speak so loud."

The Mortals in the Wood 85

He glanced fearfully at the Hut. He was terribly afraid of the Witch.

All three men were clothed in the rough and simple dress of peasants, but about the Fidler's garments there seemed something odd and graceful, something that nowadays we would call picturesque. In cut and color, his jerkin and his hose, his shoes and his loose sleeves, attracted one's eyes; and his old gigue was strangely and most charmingly shaped. He was a very big man, tall and broad-shouldered and strong, with a mane of brown hair and a thick, brown beard streaked with gray. His eyes and his voice were merry, and he walked as though he kept time to a tune that no one but himself could hear.

"Come on, now!" said he, loudly. "Can't you two go ahead with your errand? Go on! Call out the Witch!"

"Hush!" they both exclaimed. As I told you, nobody in Hellabrunn (except the Fiddler) ever called her the Witch.

"The Lady of the Wood," corrected the Wood-cutter.

"The Wise Woman," whispered the Broom-maker.

"Pouf!" laughed the Fiddler. "I call her what she is—the Witch!"

"Please do be quiet," begged the Broom-maker.

He tiptoed up to the Hut, trembling in every limb, and knocked gently on the door.

There was no answer, not a sound from within. He did not know what to do next, and, in his nervousness, all he could think of was his regular speech which he made to the housewives of Hellabrunn when he went from door to door to sell his wares.

"Goodwife," said he, "do you need a broom?"

The Fiddler burst into a roar of laughter, in which even the Wood-cutter wanted to join. Every one knows that broom-sticks are what the Witches go riding on in the wee small hours of a stormy night.

"Clever fellow!" said the Fiddler. "Maybe she'll buy out all your stock of brooms, and give a riding-party to her friends."

The Broom-maker was sulky, and would say no more.

The Wood-cutter now took his turn. He walked to the door with a great show of boldness, rapped smartly, and called:

"Honored and worthy Madam!"

But there was not a sound in reply. Not so much as a rustle or a breath came from inside the Hut. It was hard to believe that so much as a mouse lived there.

"Is there no one in the house?" cried the Wood-cutter, still very brave.

Again they listened; and again they could hear nothing. There was not a stir, it seemed, in the whole silent Wood; not a cricket, not a moving leaf, not a breath of wind.

The Fiddler was growing restless. He knew all about the Witch. And he knew that she was probably laughing at them through the keyhole. He was quite tired of the polite efforts of the Wood-cutter and the Broom-maker.

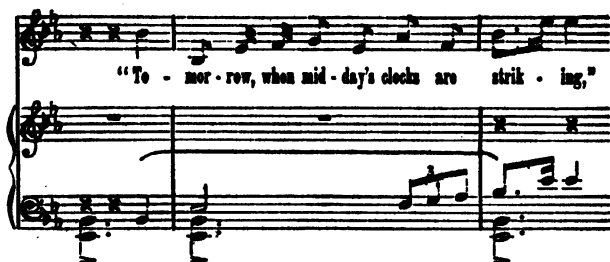
"You blind moles!" he said, impatiently. "She is making fun of you, that is all. She will not notice your glib greetings, and I respect her for it. Now for something that will please her better."



CHAPTER VII

THE WITCH'S PROPHECY

THE WITCH'S PROPHECY AND THE MAGIC BELLS



"INSOLENT rabble!" shrieked the Witch.
"Who dares to mock me?"

The Fiddler stepped forward promptly, and made her a low bow; the others were too frightened to stir or speak.

"Lovely and bewitching lady," he began, in his most flowery style, "behold your most devoted slave! Long have we adored you—"

The Witch knew that he was making fun of her, and she hated fun.

"Impudent fool!" she snapped, her wicked eyes as red as coals. "Scatter-brained knave! Worthless, chicken-hearted, lying lout!"

"Madam," said the Fiddler, pretending to be offended, but with twinkling eyes, "I am a very brave gallant, I'd have you know. When a man insults me I always strike—"

"His shadow!" retorted the Witch, who knew that a strolling player in those days was not allowed by law to fight, but only to strike at the shadow of his enemy.

"Well, anyway," said the Fiddler, turning to the others, "it's your turn. Say your say, you two, since that's what you came for. Wake up, moles, and talk!"

The Wood-cutter cleared his throat and began to speak with an air of being very much at home. When he could not think of anything to say he just hummed and mumbled, "H'm, h'm!"

"You must know, Lady," he said, "that when—h'm, h'm—since . . . in Hellabrunn

Town . . . h'm, h'm . . . there was need of . . . h'm, h'm. . . . I was chosen because—h'm, h'm. . . . You see, when the old King died—h'm, h'm . . . and since I am the best wood-cutter for miles around, I—"

"Oh, give the second one a chance to speak!" exclaimed the Fiddler. And the Wood-cutter stepped back, quite exhausted from nervousness and mopping his forehead.

The Broom-maker determined to do better. He was very tremulous and frightened, but he remembered a great many long words.

"Highly noble and exalted Lady," he began. "Wisest and most gracious Dame. You are far above the burghers, and the nobles, too! You are the most supremely sagacious and marvelously accomplished—"

"Oh, be still, you whining fools!" cried the Witch, hoarse with fury. "Say what you have to say, and say it quickly and in plain words, or else—well, look out for a sudden wind to blow your heads clean off!"

And they could see that she meant what she said.

"There!" said the Fiddler. "You see! I told you that my way would suit her better! 'Tis this way, Witch; but let us have no heads blown off, if you please. No spells to-night, on any account. Now, listen to my story."

And he told her the tale of Hellabrunn's attempt to get along without a King. He told her of the people's discontent, which was growing day by day, in spite of money, and comfort, and the good things of life. He told her that now they were anxious to have a Head, some one to whom they could look up, and to whom they could carry their troubles and disputes; some one who would do everything they wanted, and some things that they had not sense enough to think of for themselves.

"Every one in Hellabrunn has a home and a hearth-fire," said the Fiddler. "But no one has a Throne!"

And then he paused, for over the Witch's shoulder he saw something which amazed him. He saw one of the tiny shutters on the Witch's Hut move slowly, and then gradually open. Then, in the dim window, he saw the face of

a little girl, pretty and rosy, with big eyes, and golden curls falling under an old red kerchief.

The Fiddler could hardly believe his eyes. Nobody in Hellabrunn knew of the Goose Girl. They all thought that the Witch lived alone on the mountainside. He was so surprised that for a moment he could not go on.

Then, fearing that the old hag would turn and see what he had been looking at, he continued, hastily:

"A Throne! That is what the burghers of Hellabrunn are trying to build up, and then to fill. They are looking for a master or a mistress, a Prince or a Princess, sprung from the Blood Royal, entitled to wear a Crown—brave, strong, high-spirited, true, noble—a King's Son or a King's Daughter: a Royal Child.

As though he were drawn in spite of himself, he looked again toward the little window behind the Witch.

The first star of the night was glittering in the pink-flushed sky. Perhaps it was one of its beams that fell upon the sweet face of the little Goose Girl. Something seemed to shine there

as the Fiddler looked. His own words seemed to echo again in his brain: "High-spirited, true, noble—a King's Son or a King's Daughter: a Royal Child!"

The little Goose Girl put her finger on her lips and disappeared from the window.

The shutter slowly closed again.

"Well, Witch!" said the Fiddler, rousing himself. "You have heard our story. Men say that you are uncommonly wise, and can see things to which we Mortals are blind. Out of your store of magical knowledge tell us where we shall find our King, and how we shall know him when we find him!"

The Witch was leaning on her crooked stick, and seemed to be thinking deeply.

"Is he telling me the truth, I wonder?" she muttered.

Then she turned sharply to the other two.

"Are you indeed anxious to be governed?" she asked. "Are you looking for a King?"

"Yes," faltered the Broom-maker.

"We of Hellabrunn are simple workmen and tradespeople," said the Wood-cutter, speak-

ing with some sense, at last. "We are used to serve."

"Yes," said the Broom-maker again.

"You are looking for a King!" repeated the Witch, musingly, and began to murmur to herself under her breath.

"Beware of your King!" she said, suddenly, with a quick glance.

The Fiddler was prowling about the clearing, looking at the Hut from every angle, and wondering how he could learn more about the little maid whom the Witch kept hidden there. He knew that the child could not be there of her own free will, and the Fiddler's heart always went out to any one in difficulties.

"We cannot go home to Hellabrunn without some message," said the Wood-cutter.

"Give us a word of counsel!" pleaded the Broom-maker.

"Then make your long ears yet longer!" said the Witch.

Even the Fiddler drew near to hear her words. There was something solemn and wonderful about the old Witch just then. She

seemed to grow taller and more commanding. They felt that for the moment she towered above them.

It had grown quite dark. There was no more sunset in the west. Again the strange, moaning echoes woke in the shadowy Forest. The Cat's eyes gleamed in the dusk.

To the fancy of the men who listened, the air seemed full of the pealing of ghostly bells as slowly and mysteriously the Witch spoke:

"Hear now a prophecy not to your liking:
To-morrow, when mid-day's clocks are striking
And the folk for the Feast are gathering,
When Noon's twelve strokes the bells doth ring,
*The first to enter the City's Gate,
Even a vagrant in ragged state,
'Tis he that shall be your King!*"

At the last words the bells seemed to peal out more clearly. . . . Then the magic faded. The Witch had ceased speaking. The Prophecy was ended. There was no sound in the Wood, except the summer wind.

The next moment the Witch had gone quickly into her Hut and slammed the door. The three Mortals were left in the little glade alone.

The Wood-cutter was the first to recover himself.

He chuckled and rubbed his hands.

"Now for the gold-pieces!" cried he. "We have been successful in our errand. We have heard the Witch's Prophecy. Now all that we have to do is to go back to Hellabrunn and collect our payment!"

"I suppose we *must* give the Fiddler a share of the gold-pieces," complained the wretched little Broom-maker, who dearly loved money.

"Ho!" scoffed the Wood-cutter, who loved it even better, and had a more practical idea of how to keep it. "He has no right to a share! He had nothing to do with it! The Witch talked to *us*! Anyway, we'll get rid of him somehow."

At this point the Fiddler joined them.

"And now shall I tell you just what you have been thinking?" said he, mockingly. "You are both wishing that you might see me hanged to the nearest tree!"

The others looked so guilty that he laughed aloud.

"Go home!" he said, with rough good nature. "You may keep your gold-pieces to yourselves! Be off with you!"

He cuffed them both soundly, and chased them out of the clearing. It was so dark that they could hardly see where they were going, and they stumbled over a dozen roots and pebbles and scratched themselves on many brambles. And the Fiddler strode along, and drove them before him as the Goose Girl would drive her Geese.

He did not follow them. When they were out of sight, and he could not longer hear their awkward steps and angry chattering, he came slowly back into the clearing.

His mind was made up. He must know more concerning the little Girl who was a prisoner there.

That sweet child in the clutches of the horrible, cruel Wood Witch! His blood ran cold at the thought of it. He was sure that he had seen a request in the little maiden's eager face. It was plain that she had tried her best to ask him to help her.

Of course she had trusted him. Children always knew that they could trust the Fiddler. And he said to himself that he would not leave the clearing until he was satisfied that all was well with her.

Was it any wonder that the children of Hellabrunn loved him and called him "Our Fiddler?"

The crescent moon, small and silver-white, peeped down over the black tree-tops. It was a real little witch-moon. The Fiddler thought that he would like to make a song about it. There were stars, too, sprinkled over the sky. Distant owls hooted, and bats and moths flew silently past. Night in the Enchanted Forest had begun.

At this hour all the sprites and goblins of the Magic World awakened and prepared for their merrymaking. At this hour every charm and spell in the world increased in power a hundred-fold. In this hour, as the Fiddler knew well, Witchcraft reigned, and Mortals were the sport of the Unreal World. He felt quite excited as he gazed at the locked door and shuttered win-

dows of the Hut! A Witch's house, in a Magic Wood! Who could tell what might happen there?

He folded his arms and deliberately paced up and down in front of the shanty.

There was a long silence.

At last, very stealthily and softly, one of the shutters opened. The Witch looked out.

The Fiddler stopped at once and faced her, waiting to see what she would say to him.

She peered at him for a moment or two. Then she said, harshly:

"Why aren't you on your way home with your friends? What are you staying here for?"

The Fiddler walked quite close to the window, and looked at her steadily.

"I am setting a snare," said he. "I want to catch a bird—a golden bird which I saw in this neighborhood."

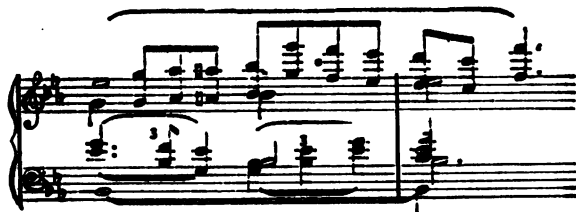
The Witch gave a start, and stared at him, frowning and glaring. She knew at once that in some way he must have seen or heard of the Goose Girl.

The Fiddler smiled.

The Witch's Prophecy 101

"Let out the golden bird, Lady Witch," said he, "or I'll come and get it myself!"

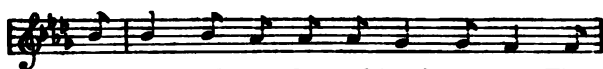
When the Fiddler sees the Goose Girl at the window there are three melodies all at once: the treble is one of the Goose Girl's airs; the bass is the Fiddler's favorite little tune; and in between is a tiny scrap of the music of Kings and Queens, because the Fiddler was thinking of a throne when he saw the little maid.



CHAPTER VIII

THE GOOSE GIRL'S STAR

THE SONG THE WITCH SANG TO THE GOOSE GIRL



"Dis-grace, and mur-der, and black alarms: These



are your pa-rents' be-quests to you!

THE Witch saw there was no use in pretending that she did not understand the Fiddler. People did not pretend much with the Fiddler. She knew well that he was a strong, determined man, with as much power for good as she had power for evil. He was brave and honest, and courage and truth are the two things hardest for Witchcraft to overcome.

So she glared at him from under her shaggy eyebrows for a moment, and then withdrew her head without a word.

The Fiddler laughed aloud with satisfaction, and began to sing to himself in the cheerfulest way possible:

"Heigh! Heigh!

Folderol-di!

So *find* we Chanticler's egg!"

And he danced a little step in time to the tune he was singing.

The Witch thought that she might be able to satisfy this interfering, bungling Mortal without really letting the Goose Girl go. She knew that the little girl was timid, and she felt fairly sure that she would never dare to defy her. So she hoped to show her prisoner to the Fiddler, convince him that the child was her own granddaughter and her own to bring up as she chose, and send him about his business.

By the light of the crescent moon the door of the Hut opened, and out stepped the Witch with the Goose Girl. The old dame was pushing the little maid before her, and pretending to be very kind and encouraging to her, but all the time she was kicking her, and poking her, and pinching her arms and shoulders.

"Come, dear little daughter, and don't be afraid!" said the Witch, sweetly. But under her breath she muttered: "You brat! I believe you peeped through the window after all! Just wait a bit!" And she gave her a hard dig in her side.

The Goose Girl trembled. She knew quite well what the Witch meant; she had been beaten too often not to understand.

The Fiddler looked pityingly and kindly at the little girl. He thought that she was the sweetest and loveliest child that he had ever seen, and he was so sorry for her that he could hardly help his eyes filling up with tears. The Goose Girl stood before him with drooping head. The Fiddler took a step forward.

"Speak to me!" he said, very gently.

The Goose Girl could not find her voice. She stood there dumb and frightened. Yet with all her helplessness and sadness, there was something so fair and graceful about her that the Fiddler thought: "That little maid has good blood. She would look well in a crown."

As the Goose Girl did not say anything, the Witch slapped her angrily.

"Speak when you're spoken to!" she scolded.

The little girl lifted her eyes piteously to the Fiddler's, but was silent.

"Who are you?" he asked, kindly.

"I—I am the Goose Girl," she said, simply.

The Fiddler looked at her closely.

"And you live in a Witch's house!" he said, smiling in his delightful, friendly fashion.

"How do you happen to be here?"

She did not answer, so he added: "Who are your father and mother?"

"I haven't any," said she. "I have no one but Grandmother."

"No one but your Grandmother!" he repeated, trying to encourage her to talk. "And who may your Grandmother be?"

The little Goose Girl's eyes were wide with surprise.

"Why, here she is!" she replied. "There—beside me!"

The Fiddler stared at her with open mouth.

"The Witch?" he said. "*Your* Grandmother?"

And with that he roared with laughter. It was such hearty, musical, rumbling laughter it seemed to clear the air like a good, brisk thunder-storm. The little Goose Girl loved him from that minute.

And oh! The rage and disgust of the Witch when she heard him laugh like that! She was so offended that she seemed to bristle, and her eyes snapped like firecrackers.

The next moment, however, the Fiddler stopped laughing. He was beginning to feel more indignant than amused.

"So that's the way she holds you!" he exclaimed. "You are free, yet she keeps you a prisoner, and says you are her grandchild! What nonsense! But you sha'n't be kept here against your will much longer! You may trust me for that, my child!"

The Goose Girl began to cry, softly but hopelessly. And before she knew it she had forgotten her shyness, and was pouring out her troubles to the kind Fiddler between her sobs.

"I cannot get away!" she whispered, broken-

ly. "Her spells hold me. I know that I shall never be free!"

Her tears fell faster. "I am very silly; I can do nothing but cry. But there is nothing to hope for."

She looked appealingly at the Fiddler's sympathetic face. "The King's Son"—she faltered, with many hesitations—"the King's Son—went by—"

The Fiddler started. Was it possible that the Goose Girl was going to show him how to find a King for Hella? Would the tidings of the Witch and the child both point to the same person?

"He wanted me to go with him," continued the Goose Girl. "But, you see, I could not go! I never can."

"But this is very wonderful!" exclaimed the Fiddler. "The King's Son, you say. Have you really seen some one who called himself a King's Son?"

The Goose Girl nodded. The Witch was listening intently.

"Indeed, my child," went on the Fiddler,

eagerly, "if you have seen a King's Son you must help us to find him. The people of the Valley are waiting for a King. They will Crown the Prince you saw, and he shall rule over them. What did your King's Son say he was going to do?"

The little Goose Girl looked bewildered.

"He said—he said that some day we would be married," she declared, timidly.

"Then," said the Fiddler, smiling, "you will wear a Crown, too! Come, let us be off together to find him for Hellabrunn and the Kingdom!"

But just then the Witch laughed. It was not happy, kindly laughter, like the Fiddler's. It was hard and cruel, like crackling fire. She was in a particularly fierce mood, and, as she was best pleased when she was hurting people, she laughed.

"The King's Son and the Goose Girl!" chuckled she, wickedly. "The King's Son and the Goose Girl! So that's the Fiddler's idea, eh?" She peered up at him, and laughed again. "Dear me! What interesting ideas he has, to be sure! They say he makes them into songs.

Perhaps he will make a song about the future wedding of the King's Son and the Goose Girl! But I tell you"—and suddenly she stopped laughing as she turned to the Goose Girl—"I tell you—your wedding-dress and your shroud will be one and the same robe!"

The stars seemed very bright and the night very clear and still. The Enchanted Forest held its breath. It was waiting for something; who could say what it was?

"I myself will sing you a song, Sir Fiddler," said the Witch. "I make you a gift of it, and it's worth more than yours, for it happens to be true. It is the Song of the Goose Girl's Inheritance!"

She smiled slowly and sourly; you could just see her face crinkle up in the dim light, and grow even uglier than usual, if that were possible. Then she began to croon this strange song:

"Your father, he was tried for slaughter,
Condemned and hanged one dawning;
And your mother, she was the Hangman's daughter,
With ringlets as red as the morning!

"She cared no whit that his hands were stained,
She wedded him there, in the dungeon chained;
And at sunrise red
The bridegroom was hanging—dead!

"Disgrace and murder and black alarms,
These are your parents' bequests to you!
The Hangman's noose is your coat of arms;
Now—let the King's Son woo!"

The Goose Girl listened to her with horror. She had been brought up, of course, without any knowledge of her parents, believing herself to be the daughter of the Witch's child. But in her heart she had always hoped that either her father or her mother had had gentle blood, and had been noble and fine-natured. You see, the little Goose Girl had always been a child of dreams, and her whole life had been spent in "making believe" about herself.

So when she heard the Witch's story, and knew that her father had been a murderer, and her mother the daughter of the common Hangman, her heart was nearly broken. She did not weep; her sorrow and disappointment were too great for tears. But she clasped her hands

with a cry which deeply touched the gentle Fiddler.

"Father! Mother!" she wailed, and hid her face.

But the Fiddler knew a way to comfort her.

It happened, by a strange chance, that he had known the Hangman and his red-haired daughter many years before. And he knew all the circumstances of the death of the Goose Girl's father. It was true that he had killed a man, but the man he had killed was a wicked nobleman, horribly cruel to every one beneath him. It was a long story, far too long to tell here, but the young man who killed the noble was kind-hearted and good, and he would not have been so terribly punished if the dead man had not been so very great and rich. But the other nobles wished to avenge their class and to frighten the common folk, and so the young man was hanged.

And afterward the Goose Girl's poor, young, red-haired mother died, too, leaving her tiny baby girl all alone. Then the Witch came along and carried the child off to her Hut.

The Fiddler had forgotten all about the little girl until now, but he remembered her parents well and tenderly, for he had seen how unhappy they had been, and how deeply they had loved each other.

So he said, in a very gentle voice: "Do not be so sad. Your father and mother were king-ly people."

The little Goose Girl looked at him wonderingly. How could that be? Kingly! The one thing that she longed to be, for the sake of the King's Son. *Kingly!*

"They were strong, and brave, and true," went on the Fiddler, softly. "I knew them both well. The Hangman's daughter and the Hangman's victim were both royal in their hearts—worthy of Crowns, both of them!"

He made her see that people's souls were stronger and greater than the conditions in which they lived; and that quite humble people were sometimes born with the qualities necessary for Kings and Queens. He explained that great sorrow, and great love, and great feelings of all kinds made people more

truly royal than either great fortunes or great names. For after all Kings were merely the persons who were best able to take care of other people!

"So be comforted!" said the Fiddler. "There is no reason why a Goose Girl should not be truly a Royal Child!"

There was one good thing about the Goose Girl. When the truth was shown to her she could understand it. She saw clearly that she need not be ashamed of her father's and mother's ill-fortune. And as she decided that she would not be ashamed, she found, suddenly, that she was not afraid any longer either—not even of the Witch!

"And anyway," said she, with a swift remembrance, "the King's Son gave his own Crown to me."

She ran to the edge of the shrubbery and called:

"Gray-Goose! Sly Goose! Bring back to me what I gave you to hide!"

Then she turned to the Fiddler with love and trust shining in her eyes.

"Oh, you are good! You are kind! I will go with you, and you will show me how to find the King's Son again. I was afraid before, but now I am not. Oh, please tell me that you think I shall find him again!"

The wise Gray Goose waddled up with the Crown, and the Goose Girl took it into her hands.

"Squawk! I wish you joy," said the Goose, gravely, and went solemnly off to join the others.

The Goose Girl went up to the Witch.

"You must let me go now," she said. "You *must* set me free."

"No," said the Witch, in a terrible voice. "Never—never! I shall hold you a prisoner until you are in your grave!"

She raised her stick with a threatening gesture. And again the magic wind swept through the clearing and the ghostly voices spoke.

The Goose Girl turned instinctively toward the Fiddler, but he shook his head.

"If you wish to be a Royal Child," he said, "you must escape from the magic spells with



SHE KNELT AND LIFTED HER FACE TO THE SKY, HOLDING THE CROWN IN HER TWO HANDS



no help from me or from any one else. Courage is Royalty. And though one who has never been afraid is very brave, one who has felt fear and conquered it is still braver. But until then you have no right to wear that Crown."

The Goose Girl looked at the big circlet of gold which she held. All the power of Witchcraft, all the mysterious strength of the Black Arts, all the forces of Enchantment, seemed to rise like a wall about the child which they had controlled for so many years. But she was not afraid any more.

She untied her kerchief, and her long, fair hair fell about her shoulders, a shimmering veil in the faint light. Then she knelt and lifted her face to the sky, holding the Crown in her two hands.

There were many blazing stars there now, but the one just above her seemed brighter and whiter than the rest. Her eyes fixed themselves on this star, she did not know why, as she prayed this odd little prayer:

"Father and Mother, I will pray, and I think you will answer me. Am I to go away and

be free from the Witch? Shall I see the King's Son again? Am I to be royal like him, and wear his Crown, and share his Throne? Father and Mother, send me some sign, some answer so that I shall know that you hear me praying. Hear me, think of me—come down to me!"

There was a blinding blaze of snowy, silver light. The far-away white star at which she gazed flamed out like a sun, and then—*fell!* The answer had come.

The Star fell straight out of Heaven, flashing downward through the dim night, and finally dropped—right into the heart of the yellow Lily in the garden—the Goose Girl's Flower!

Do you remember the King's Son's angry farewell? You see, the impossible sometimes happens after all.

"Free! Free! Free!" cried the little Goose Girl, joyously, and she set her Crown upon her head; then she ran like the wind into the Enchanted Forest. And not all the Black Magic in the world could stop her this time.

As for the Fiddler, he was dancing about the clearing.

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"Heigh! Heigh!
Folderol-di!"

he sang,

"So the Royal Child goes free!"

And off he strode after the little maid.

The air was filled with a sudden rush of wings. There was a quick gleam of white—another—another! The whole flock of Geese were flying after the Goose Girl!

In the little clearing the Witch stood motionless under the moon, staring at the great Star flaming in the Lily. It was the Goose Girl's Star; it was the Goose Girl's Flower. The Witch knew that as long as they bloomed and blazed there the child would be safe and happy. She looked and looked for a space, without moving.

Then she raised her crooked stick and crushed the Flower.

The Goose Girl's Star went out.

WHEN THE STAR FELL FROM HEAVEN AND PROVED
THAT THE GOOSE GIRL WAS ROYAL AFTER ALL



PART II

THE TOWN OF HELLABRUNN

CHAPTER IX

THE INN AT THE CITY GATE

MOTIF OF THE KING'S SWORD



Now we must see what happened to the King's Son when he raced off from the Witch's Hut and the Goose Girl in such a fury.

At first the big Wood appeared to laugh at him and make fun of him. Little Goblins seemed to grin from behind trees, and the wind in the underbrush made a sound like chuckling as he went by. And every brook he crossed giggled away as though the whole affair were a great joke.

"Dear, dear!" he fancied that the Wood Things were saying, mockingly, "so this is a King's Son, to be sure! What a splendid person is a King's Son! What self-control he has, what dignity, what fine manners, and *what* a nice temper! We are glad to see at last what a real King's Son should be!"

So they seemed to chatter together, until the boyish Prince felt his face burn with shame at the thought of his rudeness to the Goose Girl.

After a while he grew a little cooler and calmer, and went on in a less headlong manner. He stopped, now and then, to fan himself with his cap, and to think things over more sensibly. He felt sorrier than ever for his unkindness and impoliteness to the dear little girl in the clearing, and more than once he had a serious impulse to run back and ask her to forgive him.

But his pride—you know, the King's Son had far too much pride—would not let him do that just yet. He thought that he should rather wait until he had done some fine things and become a really important person. It would be much pleasanter, it seemed to him,

to go back and ask her pardon if he were rich and famous and great. Down in his foolish young heart he had a wish to have the Goose Girl see him as a King's Son instead of a ragged huntsman. She had not been a bit impressed when he told her he was a Prince; he was just silly enough to wish that he could show himself off to her in such a royal aspect that she would have to be a little awed. So he decided to wait awhile.

And meanwhile he would look about for exciting things to do, noble deeds by which to make himself famous and great and admired.

His adventures with wild beasts, and storms, and steep paths, in crossing the Wonderful Mountains, had been all very well. He had proved that he could stand hardships cheerfully, and that it would take a good deal of danger to make him afraid. And he had found out how strong and well he was, and what fun it was to live out of doors and look out for himself.

So far so good! But he knew nothing of men and women; for he hardly counted his

courtiers and serving-people at home as human beings. He had never tried to use his wits, and he had never tried to earn money, nor to win any sort of place for himself among his fellow-creatures. He knew that the right sort of boys could do very well in the world even without help. They were bright, and pleasant-mannered, and patient, and energetic, and people were glad to have them about, and to give them all the work that they wanted to do. Every common lad had the chance of a living in the world. And surely he—a King's Son—could do at least as well as a common lad!

He was anxious to go about it without further delay. And as soon as his temper had sufficiently cooled he began to consider the best and quickest way of reaching the world of men.

The little Goose Girl had spoken of the Mortal Folk in the Valley. He commenced to descend the mountainside with eager steps, keeping a sharp lookout for distant roofs.

At last he reached a large rock with a good space of clear trees around and beneath it. He

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saw that it jutted far out, and overhung the lowlands. From it he had a fine view for miles and miles.

At the foot of the mountain he could see a winding highroad lying like a cream-colored ribbon across the green country. And, quite far away, was the Town of Hellabrunn, with a great City Wall about it and an enormous City Gate, which he could see even from his distant mountainside.

The King's Son gazed and gazed at the red and gray roofs, the faint trails and wreaths of smoke, and the occasional leafy tree-top, which went to make up the City of Hellabrunn. His heart beat fast with hope and excitement. It was there that he was going to prove himself the most remarkable boy in the world, and thus learn to be a true King's Son.

He wondered what marvelous things were going to happen to him in Hellabrunn. In his imagination he saw himself winning everybody's admiration — fighting robbers, slaying wicked men with the King's Sword, and finally receiving a laurel wreath as a mark of esteem

from the townspeople. Then he would proclaim that he was a King's Son, with a King's Throne awaiting him beyond the mountains!

Ah! That would be a thrilling moment—worth waiting and working for, more exciting far than the comfortable, proper Coronation which he would have in the Contented Kingdom.

But meanwhile he must get to Hellabrunn! He ate a hasty supper of wild strawberries and spring-water, and set out in search of the town and the wonderful adventures for which he was so eager.

It was growing late, so he went forward as fast as he could, wishing to reach the city by nightfall. But darkness had come before he was out of the Forest. Perhaps the Enchanted Wood did not wish him to escape too soon!

Once he caught a glimpse of three men climbing the steep hillside a little distance from him. One, the tallest and the foremost, was singing. The King's Son noticed that the melody was a fine one, and it rang in his ears for long afterward. The other two men were

following less actively, and grumbling a great deal. Of course, they were our friends the Fiddler, the Wood-cutter, and the Broom-maker, on their way from Hellabrunn to the "Wise Woman's" Hut. But they did not see the King's Son, and he went on down the mountain.

It was long past sunset when he reached the highroad, and he was already very tired and hungry. But he had made up his mind to find shelter in the town that night, and he would take no rest until he reached his journey's end. So he tramped along stoutly, cheering himself up by thinking of all the interesting things that were going to happen some day.

The moon rose—the crescent moon that was shining at that moment on the Fiddler as he waited outside the Witch's Hut. Now the King's Son could see the lights of Hellabrunn twinkling faintly out of the shadowy distance ahead of him. He quickened his pace, and thought of the comfortable bed and hot supper which were sure to be waiting for him somewhere in the town. How long it seemed

since he had slept in a bed or eaten at a table!

During the evening a shower fell and wet the King's Son to the skin. So his hunting-boots and coarse, red jerkin were not only torn to shreds, but plastered with mud as well. He was as shabby as the worst beggar that ever trudged that highway to the Town of Hellabrunn.

At last, very late that night, he reached the City Gates. They stood open still, but the Gate-keepers were at hand, and about to close them for the night. They saw the shadow of a vagrant dragging his weary way along the road, and called to him roughly to make haste. He did so, hurrying through the entrance; and the big iron doors clanged behind him, and the huge bolt was lifted into place.

So the King's Son entered Hellabrunn.

He found himself in a small square in front of a low building with lights in the windows. Along one side stretched the tall City Wall into the darkness. Ahead of him were the twisted, narrow streets and alleys of the Town.

The citizens of Hellabrunn went to bed early, and there appeared to be nobody out of doors, except the Gate-keepers and the Night Watchman, who were grumbling together about the change in the weather.

The King's Son could see almost nothing in the dim light, and the strange place utterly bewildered him. He did not know whether he should go on into the Town and explore, or knock at the door of the lighted house. At last he decided to do the latter, and walked boldly up to the building.

He had to rap several times before any one answered. Certainly Hellabrunn did not seem as hospitable as he had expected. At last the door was slowly opened by a dirty, tattered girl with bare feet, and a ragged dress tucked up under an old apron. She had untidy hair, and looked cross and tired.

In the lighted room behind her was a second girl washing some very big pots and pans. She seemed a little cleaner than the first, but just as weary and just as disagreeable.

The King's Son felt rather shy, but he pulled

off his cap and asked a few questions, very humbly and courteously. The girls told him ill-temperedly that the house was an Inn, but that they were only the servants, and could not take anybody in without permission from the Innkeeper. He and his daughter had both gone to bed. They were finishing their work and getting things ready for a great feast-day and merrymaking on the morrow.

The King's Son did not know what to do. He looked wistfully into the room where the maids were working, and wished that he could afford to come in and order a supper. But he had no money, and he could not quite bring himself to beg from the serving-wenches of the Inn!

He was turning away with a sigh when they stopped him. They had warm hearts, in spite of their scowling faces, and they could see that he was tired and hungry. He was a nice-looking boy, too, and more polite than the lads of the Town, so they decided to look after him.

The Bar-Maid, the girl with the pots and pans,

found him some cold scraps, and the dirty, barefooted lass who said she was the Stable-Maid told him roughly but kindly that she would find him a corner in the stable where, at any rate, he could sleep under shelter.

The King's Son thanked them civilly and with real gratitude, and ate his bread, and cheese, and cold bacon, and drank his stale mead with an excellent appetite. Then he waited outside in the rain while the Stable-Maid found and lighted a battered lantern.

Then she put on a pair of wooden shoes, which made a great deal of noise as she walked, though she kept telling the King's Son to be perfectly quiet. She came outside with the lantern, and led the way, splashing through the wet darkness. The King's Son followed her in silence, thinking, to tell the truth, that he had never seen anything quite so funny as her dumpy, shabby figure clumping along through the mud in the ungainly wooden shoes, with the queer old lantern casting big shadows as it swung.

They went around the Inn, and through the courtyard at the back. A faint whinnying sound told him that they were somewhere near a stable. The next moment the Stable-Maid stopped, set down the light, and unlocked the door of the low, weather-beaten barn. She beckoned to him, and when he approached pushed him inside with a rough but friendly hand.

Then, when he was safe inside, she shut the door, leaving him in the dark, and took up her lantern again. He could hear her wooden shoes going away — splish - splosh, clump! Splish - splosh, clump! Then all was still again.

Left alone in that pitch-black barn, the King's Son groped about him for some moments without touching anything at all. Suddenly he stumbled over something soft, and at the same time a great grunting and squealing arose. For a second he was thoroughly angry and disgusted. Then his sense of humor overcame him. He sat down on the floor and laughed till he cried. So this was the first

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of the wonderful adventures of the King's
Son!

He was to sleep in the pig-pen!

ONE OF THE MELODIES OF THE KING'S SON



CHAPTER X

THE INNKEEPER'S DAUGHTER

WHEN THE INNKEEPER'S DAUGHTER AND THE STABLE-
MAID CHATTERED OUTSIDE THE INN



WHEN THEY QUARRELED



THE next day dawned bright and clear in
Hellabrunn.

The whole City was in wild excitement. The
Wood-cutter and the Broom-maker had come
back from the mountain the evening before,

and though only the Town Council knew precisely what message they had brought from the Witch, there were a number of rumors abroad. The news had gone about that the Wise Woman had made a Prophecy concerning the future King of Hella—a Prophecy which was to come true that very day.

The citizens and their good wives talked it over and wondered how much truth there might be in the report. There was no doubt in any one's mind that something thrilling was about to happen.

Every year Hellabrunn held a sort of Festival, like our modern Holidays, when people did no regular business, but just enjoyed themselves. On that day the young men and the pretty girls dressed themselves in their best and gayest clothes; the innkeepers got ready great casks of wine and platters of good food, and the housewives hung bright garlands and streamers from their windows.

The date of this yearly merrymaking had come, and now Hellabrunn looked upon it as an occasion of especial celebration and rejoic-

ing. Before sunset—if the gossip was true—there would be a ruler in the City. Already they had begun to call it the King's Day.

It was whispered that the Witch had something about the Gate in her Prophecy; and it was in the square before it that the Tribunal of the Town Council had been put up. The Tribunal was just a platform with a canopy, and benches on which the Councilors and their wives could sit. You can see that of all the taverns in the City the one by the great Gate was sure to make the most money on the King's Day.

The whole household of the Inn rose at dawn and hurried about the morning work. The Stable-Maid got a big basket and hastened off to market, and the Bar-Maid started in to polish off the tables and benches in front of the hostelry.

Even the Innkeeper's Daughter got up early—though usually she was a very lazy maiden—and began to decorate the tavern with great branches and strings of little fir-cones brought from the wooded hillside.

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The Innkeeper's Daughter was a big, good-looking, loud-voiced girl, far too rough in manner and far too fond of fine clothes. She spent a great deal of money on tasteless, gaudy dresses, and bright-hued ribbons that did not match. She curled her coarse, black hair, and wore brilliant buckles on her slippers, and even her aprons and kerchiefs were covered with cheap, showy trimming.

She was not dainty nor pretty like the Goose Girl. Her manners were not gentle and her expression was not sweet. And, in her gay blue petticoat and embroidered apron with cherry-red bows, I do not think that she looked half so charming as the Witch's little maid in her old gray gown.

The Innkeeper spoiled his daughter, and she very seldom worked, or did anything useful. Usually she left all that to the poor Stable-Maid and Bar-Maid. But to-day was different. To-day a King was coming to Hellabrunn, and—who could tell? He might stop at the Inn for a cup of wine or mead; he might even throw a compliment to the Innkeeper's Daughter!

So she was up bright and early that lovely summer morning, and sitting outside the tavern, making garlands as busily as though she were used to it.

The square was deserted except for the two Gate-keepers, dressed in queer costumes of crimson, with shining helmets and long spears. They walked back and forth in front of the entrance to the City. The great doors were still closed and bolted, according to the orders of the Town Council.

From a distance the Innkeeper's Daughter could hear the murmur of voices as she worked. The Council Hall was not many streets away. Clearly, the people of the Town were waiting there for further news. The Innkeeper's Daughter felt quite excited. There would be great doings in Hellabrunn, one might be sure! Well, she for one would be glad for a King to be crowned at last. There would be processions, and golden coaches, and all manner of interesting things to look at and talk about.

She glanced at the sun, getting higher and hotter every minute, and her fingers moved

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more energetically than ever. The Inn by the City Gate must be well decked out and decorated on the King's Day.

There was a clumping of wooden shoes on the roughly paved street, and the Stable-Maid came flying around the corner. She was out of breath, her dirty cap was askew, and her heavy basket bobbed and bumped as she ran.

"Mistress, mistress!" she cried, loudly. "You never saw anything like the streets this morning! There's a perfect mob in front of the Town Hall—all shouting and running in every direction. I could hardly get across the Market-place."

She fanned herself with her apron.

"The Comb-cutter let me stand in his doorway a moment," she added, "to rest a bit and watch the great doings."

The Innkeeper's Daughter scowled at her.

"The Comb-cutter!" she sniffed. "A common, vulgar man! Fancy wasting one's time on a Comb-cutter!"

"He's a kind, good man!" exclaimed the Stable-Maid, indignantly.

"Shut your mouth!" snapped the Innkeeper's Daughter, rudely, and threw a fir-cone at her.

The Stable-Maid began to cry noisily, for the cone had hit her face. She slammed down her basket and clumped over to the Bar-Maid for sympathy.

"The Mistress has nearly broken my teeth!" she sobbed, angrily. "Horrid, bullying, vain creature! How I hate her! Don't you?"

She took up a handful of straw and began to help rub off the tables. The Innkeeper's Daughter had worked as long as she could possibly bring herself to do anything. She pushed away the leaves and evergreen and fir-cones, and began to smooth her hair and pull out her cherry-colored ribbons. The Stable-Maid made a face at the back of her head.

"Are you all dressed up to welcome the King, Mistress?" she asked, with spiteful sweetness.

"And why shouldn't I be?" demanded the Innkeeper's Daughter, whose opinion of herself was very good indeed.

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"I suppose *that* isn't waste of time?" said the Stable-Maid, who had not forgotten how horrid the Mistress had been about the Comb-cutter.

"Don't talk so much! And a King's *very* different from a Comb-cutter!" declared the Innkeeper's Daughter, with her nose in the air.

"I think, Fair Lady, that the King would agree with you," said an amused voice from the corner of the Inn.

The Innkeeper's Daughter turned around with a little jump. She saw a straight, handsome lad, with dark hair, merry eyes, and a brown face. It was our King's Son, of course, who had spent the night in the pig-pen. He smiled at the Innkeeper's Daughter, and she looked him over. She liked his face and bearing, but she sniffed at his ragged, weather-stained clothes. She was too stupid to see that even in those tatters he looked like a Prince. To her he was just a tramp, though an attractive one.

"Hoity-toity!" said she. "His lordship seems very much at home."

You see, the King's Son was used to a Royal Palace, and I suppose that he did not look so humble as a poor wanderer was expected to look. The Innkeeper's Daughter turned to the Stable-Maid.

"Who is he?" she asked, bluntly. And, as the youth strolled across the square, glancing about him, she added, frowning, "Does he think he owns the place?"

"Poor knave!" said the Stable-Maid. "*He* doesn't own anything. He's a beggar! He came late last night and slept with the pigs."

"He's nice-looking, but stuck-up," said the Innkeeper's Daughter. "A beggar, eh?"

She was so vain that she wanted even a beggar to admire her, and it made her cross that the King's Son had hardly looked at her, except to bow and smile—and he had bowed and smiled to the two serving-lasses just as pleasantly.

"Be off with you!" she said suddenly to the Stable-Maid. "Get me some yarn for my spinning-wheel!"

"Why don't you say 'I want to speak to the

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gentleman alone,' and be done with it?" said the Stable-Maid, impertinently, and took herself off.

I am afraid that the poor Stable-Maid was really excessively rude, but she worked so hard and was so roughly treated that it was wonderful she ever had a kind word for anybody.

The Innkeeper's Daughter decided to be gracious to the very polite beggar-boy. She made room on the bench where she was sitting, and said in a patronizing way:

"You may sit beside me."

If she had been able to look into the mind of the King's Son she would not have wasted time in trying to be amiable to him. To tell the truth, he was not thinking of her at all; he was not even thinking of the Stable-maid (whom he liked much better than the Innkeeper's Daughter), nor of the pig-pen, nor the Inn by the City Gate, nor anything in Hella-brunn.

He was thinking of the Goose Girl. And he was thinking of her harder and more steadily than he had ever thought of anything in his

life. It seemed very odd; and it had come about in this way:

The King's Son had had a Dream—not the ordinary sort of dream, in which all kinds of silly, topsy-turvy things happen, everything in such a muddle that you can only remember scraps here and there—not that manner of dream at all. No; he had dreamed something from which he was not able to get away; something which he could not drive out of his head; something which had seemed so clear, so real, he could not help believing that if it had not been true it was going to be some time.

You remember he had not been affected by the Witch's Magic nor by the Enchanted Forest the day before. Well, it was just as though that Magic and that Enchantment had followed him and surrounded him while he was asleep. His head was full of the noise of bells—yes, big, pealing, tuneful bells that rang and rang and rang, now loud, now low—now close to him, now far away. Through his heavy slumber—for he had slept the deep sleep

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of fatigue—this chiming and tolling had gone on, it seemed, for a very long time.

Then suddenly he had dreamed that the sun was shining very brilliantly, and that just before him in the blaze of light stood the Goose Girl. She was just as he remembered her, dressed in the rough gray gown and the shabby little shoes. But in his Dream the old red kerchief was gone, and her long, fair hair streamed about her, gleaming in the sun. And on her head was the Crown—his Crown—which he had thrown into the bushes near the Witch's Hut.

And even when he was wide awake the Dream stayed with him. When he closed his eyes he could still see the little Goose Girl with the gold Crown on her gold hair, and he could still hear the slow, deep pealing of the strange dream-bells.

So, when the Innkeeper's Daughter asked him to sit down by her he did not really want to, but he had to be polite. So he thanked her and sat down with a little bow. She looked at him in a superior way.

"Your eyes look as though you felt ill," she remarked, critically.

"I'm not ill!" said the boy, rather indignant-ly. "I—I've been dreaming, that's all. I can't seem to get awake."

"When your dreams weigh on you like that," said the Innkeeper's Daughter, who was practical, and not fanciful, "it means that you're hungry. Have you had any breakfast?"

The lad colored. His pockets were even emptier than his stomach. He could not afford breakfast, and knew it.

"I—I'm in no hurry!" he said, hastily.

The Innkeeper's Daughter could not understand why he should be embarrassed. He was a beggar; he ought to be willing to beg for a meal. Why should *he* be proud? She called the Bar-Maid.

"Bring out some nice, fat, rich pork!" said she, with the air of a very grand person ordering a feast. "And you might get a tankard of wine, too," she added, more doubtfully. She did not want to be *too* generous to a beggar.

The maid went into the Inn kitchen. Cook-

ing was already going on, and the air was full of the smells from it. They were not the nice smells that come from good things to eat, but the strong, disagreeable odors of coarse food. The King's Son forgot his Dream long enough to wish for a breakfast of wild grapes and sassafras, such as he had lately had in the woods—anything rather than the cabbage and salt beef and onion soup which were being prepared for the Inn breakfast.

"Doesn't that delicious scent make you feel better?" asked the Innkeeper's Daughter, whose nose was not sensitive.

"N-no," faltered the King's Son. "It-it smells a tiny bit—greasy, doesn't it?" Then, seeing her frown, he added, hastily, "I'm afraid I'm spoilt."

"You do put on a good many airs for a beggar," said she, eying him with displeasure.

The King's Son looked up quickly.

"Please don't think that!" he said, in his gentle, well-bred voice. "All I ask for, Mistress, is a cup of water and a bit of bread."

"We wouldn't give bread and water to—to

—to—a *tailor!*” said the Innkeeper’s Daughter, with a haughty air.

The King’s Son was a little amused, but he said, gravely, “You are very great people here, then?”

The Innkeeper’s Daughter tossed her head.

“Oh, we can hold our own with the best of them!” she said. “We wear handsome clothes”—she smoothed her gay skirt—“and—we *know the world*, I can tell you!”

The Bar-Maid came out of the Inn with a big dish heaped with boiled pork and cabbage, and a tin tankard and cup. She placed the things on the table and went on with her work. The food looked most unpleasant to the boy, but the Innkeeper’s Daughter thought that he should have been delighted with it. She pressed him to eat the pork and to drink the cheap, sour wine, talking all the time of her own generosity and his good fortune, until he was more disgusted with her bad manners than he was with the meal.

But he tried to eat, and thanked her. He could swallow very little, and soon rose, saying

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that he had had all he wanted. The Innkeeper's Daughter strongly suspected that he did not like his breakfast, and she looked at him ill-naturedly, saying in the rudest tone possible: "You starved cat! You can stay starved if you like!"

"I have made you angry," said the King's Son, courteously. "Please let me beg your pardon! Indeed I am grateful, and I ate all that I could."

The Innkeeper's Daughter told him that he might rest under the tree if he liked. She was rather pleased with his good manners.

But the tree happened to be a linden, and it was beneath a linden-tree that he had sat with the Goose Girl. As soon as he went near it he breathed its perfume, and immediately the bells of his Dream began to peal through his brain once more.

"You blind bat!" said the Innkeeper's Daughter, sharply. "What are you staring at?"

The King's Son did not hear her. He was feeling in his doublet for the wreath the Goose Girl had given him under the linden-tree.

"You don't hear one word I say!" said the Innkeeper's Daughter, exasperated. "Look at me! Don't you think I am pretty, beggar?"

The King's Son looked at her.

"You are not so pretty as the Goose Girl," he said, telling the simple truth.

"Oh, you beggar! You slave! You starving thief! You drowned rat!" screamed the Innkeeper's Daughter. "I'll scratch your face in a minute!" And, indeed, she looked like an angry cat.

"It wouldn't surprise me at all," said the King's Son, coolly, beginning to grow tired of all this.

"Wait! I'll be even with you yet!" gasped the Innkeeper's Daughter, and boxed his ears.

Then she flew like a whirlwind up the steps and into the Inn.

"Here's your spinning-yarn, Mistress!" cried the Stable-Maid, with shrill mockery.

"Take it and hang yourself with it!" replied the Innkeeper's Daughter.

"What a nice time they seem to have been

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having!" said the Stable-Maid to the Bar-Maid, as they carried another bench outside.

The King's Son meanwhile was rubbing his cheek. His ears had never been boxed before.

Suddenly he laughed aloud to himself.

"That," said he, to the linden-tree, "is an entirely new kind of homage for the King's Son!"

THE MELODY OF THE INNKEEPER'S DAUGHTER



CHAPTER XI

"A SWINEHERD!"

FLOWER-WHISPERS FROM THE WREATH



THE King's Son was cross. Though he had been able to laugh all the time, his talk with the Innkeeper's Daughter had annoyed him. It had been his first real conversation with a vulgar and disagreeable person, and he felt badly ruffled by it. He said to himself that he much preferred the society of the bears and wolves of the woodlands to that of the citizens of Hellabrunn. For an angry moment he was even tempted to leave the City and hunt his adventures elsewhere. He had not stopped to think that he would be just as likely to find bad manners and stupidity in other towns.

Unfortunately, there was nothing unusual about Hellabrunn, as he would have found if he had continued his journey.

He thought of going back to the Contented Kingdom, where, though he might be bored, he would at least be comfortable, and where, even if persons might be a trifle dull, they would at least be pleasant and courteous. He turned impulsively to begin his homeward travels, and said aloud:

"Good-by, Hellabrunn!"

But something stopped him. He felt distinctly a touch upon his breast. What was it? Some breath of magic, no doubt; he could not say. It pressed him; it pricked him. Suddenly he knew what it was. It was the Wreath inside his doublet—the broken Wreath in exchange for which he had offered the Goose Girl his Crown.

He pulled out the little garland of leaves and flowers, and was amazed to see that it was as fresh and unfaded as when it had first been picked. Not a petal was torn, not a leaf wilted. It was wonderful! And as he held

the Wreath in his hands the blossoms seemed to whisper to him with tiny, rustling voices: "Do not go—do not go—do not go—"

The King's Son straightened up sharply and flushed crimson under his tan.

"Even the flowers have to reprove me!" he murmured. "I was afraid! I was afraid of the bothers and discomforts ahead of me. I wanted to run away—I, the King's Son! That is what this beggar's business has done to me!"

He felt hot with shame. He had entered Hellabrunn full of hope and courage, prepared to do any work that he might find, and to meet all hardships merrily. He had wanted to learn how to rule by first learning how to serve—which, by-the-by, is the only true education for Kings' Sons. And now he was shrinking from every tiny annoyance, every disagreeable trifle, as though he were a coward and a weakling! Leave Hellabrunn? Not now, even if they ordered him to! He would stay there a year at least—twelve long, uncomfortable, industrious months. Then he would see if he felt better able to become a King. Yes, he would

stay, and work, and be obedient—he would stay!

And all the buds and blossoms on the little green Wreath began to whisper again; and this time they said: “Yes—yes—yes—”

For some reason, as soon as he had made his decision and put the Wreath back inside his doublet, the King's Son felt much happier. Nothing is more comforting than to have uncertain things settled once for all, whether for good or ill. And now that he was sure that he was going to stay in Hellabrunn for the present, the Prince found himself taking a much keener interest in everything. The sun looked brighter and the linden-tree smelled sweeter. And he remembered that he was young and strong, and that there was just as much hope of wonders and adventures before him as there had been yesterday. So he cheered up.

And as he became a little more wide awake he noticed the sound which was steadily growing in the streets—the noise of excited voices in great numbers. Hellabrunn was restless and impatient. Every one, rich and poor alike,

was out and gaily dressed. For not only was it the yearly Feast of Hella, but also the King's Day!

The morning was no longer young. Already the sun was high in the heavens. Soon it would be noon. Soon the big bells would ring the hour of twelve, and then—well, then nobody knew exactly what *would* happen. That was why they were so excited.

The voices were coming nearer; the people were assembling for the mid-day hour. From all quarters in Hellabrunn they were flocking toward the City Gate.

A crowd of boys dashed into the square. They were in wild spirits, and romped into the Councilors' Tribunal, and swarmed up the City Wall to try to get a glimpse of the high-road over the top. Of course they all hoped to see the King approaching. But the Gatekeepers chased them all away, and held out their great spears as barriers.

"Back! Back!" they cried. "No one may come near the Gate this morning. The Councilors have given the command. Neither man

nor woman, neither girl nor boy, neither burgher nor peasant—none may come near the Gate!"

People were now pouring into the square from three different directions. They were chattering together like so many sparrows. The maidens had been saving up for months to buy finery for the Hella Festival Day, and their ribbons and broideries made a gay showing. The lads, too, had bright streamers on their sleeves, flower-favors tucked into their belts, and feathers in their caps. And nearly every one had beautiful new shoes, for dancing was the favorite amusement of Hellabrunn's young folk. They liked to dance to the music of bagpipes, and by this time the air was noisy with the whining and squealing of these queer old instruments.

"None may come near the Gate!" droned the Gate-keepers as the square filled.

The two big, red-clad men with helmets and spears talked together in undertones. The King's Son heard them, but he did not know what they meant.

"There's not a man but would like well

enough to be near the Gate when the clock strikes noon!" said one of them.

"The nearer the better," said the other. "Though for a fact *near* is not the word; say, rather, *through*! Aye, any one would be glad to be going through the Gate at twelve, if what I hear is true!"

"'Twould be an easy way to get oneself made King," quoth the first. "To walk through a Gate!"

A woman near him overheard, and said to her companion: "Is it true that the first to enter the City will be made King?"

"Yes, and no," replied the man to whom she spoke. "The King is to come at noon, they say. So they keep the Gate closed that he may be the first to enter."

"Oh, wouldn't you like to be the King?" she sighed.

Just then the bagpipes struck up a strange, ancient air, and the girls and boys cried:

"That is the 'Dance of Spring!' Let us dance the Dance of Spring! Dance—dance—dance!"

And they ran into the center of the square, and caught hands. Then they danced the Dance of Spring, and the bagpipes wailed, and the onlookers shouted their encouragement and admiration. It was a very pretty dance, full of graceful steps and charming poses, and altogether, with so many attractive people and so many gay costumes, the little square looked like a garden in bloom.

“Dance—dance! It is the King’s Day!” cried every one. And, as the King’s Son looked on, he wished deep down at the bottom of his heart that he, too, could dance the Dance of Spring on the King’s Day. I am not sure that he would not have gone up to one of the pretty maidens and asked her to dance if at that moment the Innkeeper had not come out of the tavern.

The King’s Son was anxious to have a word with this person, so he forgot the Dance of Spring, and drew near, waiting for a chance to speak to him.

The Innkeeper was a short, fat man with a jolly red face, but sly and angry little twinkling

eyes. He wore a scarlet cap and a huge white apron caught up into his belt at one side. He was a person who had two sets of manners—one set for his guests, from whom he might get money, and one set for his servants, to whom he had to give it.

Just now he was talking loudly and roughly, for he was overseeing the final preparations for the day's trade, and the poor maids and apprentices were rushing about like frightened chickens.

The Innkeeper saw that the crowd was going to be a very large one, and he rubbed his hands with satisfaction. There would be many casks of wine drunk that day!

"Bring some planks!" he said to the serving-lads. "Bring *many* planks! We must make plenty of extra benches. The more people who can sit down, the more will order food and drink. Aha!"

They rolled out empty kegs, and laid boards across them, until there were quite a number of benches in front of the Inn by the City Gate. Already several persons were seated and giving

orders, and the Bar-Maid and Stable-Maid were hurrying in and out of the house carrying pitchers and cups, and platters of hot cakes.

The Innkeeper gave the Bar-Maid an angry cuff when no one was looking.

"You silly wench!" he scolded. "You are pouring out too much of my good wine! Give them half measure—they will never know the difference. And when the casks are partly empty fill them up again with water. These stupid people will be none the wiser; they do not know good wine from bad!"

The Bar-Maid scowled, for she did not like him any better than she did his daughter. But she went off obediently to pour a bucket of water into one of the half-empty barrels of wine, grumbling to the Stable-Maid the while.

"Ah," said the Stable-Maid, with an armful of dirty tankards to be washed. "This is the way we spend the King's Day!"

The square was crowded with laughing, singing, chattering people, and the Dance of Spring went on faster and more merrily than ever. And the sun climbed higher, and every moment

brought the hour of noon closer to Hellabrunn Town.

The King's Son approached the Innkeeper.

"Mine host," he said—for so they used to call the landlords of taverns in the olden days—"I wish you a very good morning."

The Innkeeper turned his cross little eyes in his direction.

"Can you spare me a moment?" went on the King's Son, politely. "I would like to speak to you, if I may."

"What do you want?" demanded the Innkeeper, as sharply and rudely as his daughter would have spoken.

"I am a traveler—" began the King's Son.

The Innkeeper looked at his torn doublet and shabby boots, and snorted scornfully. "A traveler!" he snapped. "Where is your horse?"

"I have lost my horse," said the King's Son, quietly, thinking of his beautiful white palfrey in his far-away Kingdom.

"You can't travel far without one," said the Innkeeper, in a surly way.

"I don't want to," returned the King's Son.

"I—I—" he braced himself, and took the plunge. "I am looking for work!"

"What sort of work?" asked the Innkeeper.

"I don't know," answered the King's Son.

"You know what you can do, I suppose?" said the Innkeeper, gruffly. "What *can* you do?"

The King's Son was ashamed to remember how few useful things he knew how to do.

"I—I am used to horses and dogs," he said, with some hesitation. "I could do anything in a stable or kennels, I am sure. And," he went on, bravely, "I can do odd jobs!" He tried to remember what working-boys were supposed to say. "You'll find me quite—quite—quite trustworthy and hard-working," he finished, delighted with himself.

"H'm!" grunted the Innkeeper. "Trustworthy and hard-working, eh? It's easy enough to give yourself a good reference. But have you any other?"

The King's Son smiled. Most people loved him when he smiled.

"Come, sir," he said, coaxingly, "don't be too hard on me!"

The Innkeeper considered.

"I only need one servant at present," he said, ungraciously, "and that is a Swineherd."

"A Swineherd!" gasped the King's Son, for this was really too much, or seemed so, when he first thought of it.

"Yes; some one to look out for the pigs. And as you say you are fond of animals—" The innkeeper stopped as he saw the boy's expression.

"A Swineherd!" the Prince repeated, with horror.

The Innkeeper grunted once more.

"H'm! Doesn't suit you, eh?" he said. "Oh, well, with the silly face and finicky ways of a young lady, you couldn't be expected to—"

The King's Son flushed deeply and stood up very straight indeed. He set his jaw rather hard. Other boys had to be swineherds; very well. He could be! And he would prove to these horrid and disgusting people that no pigs in the world could be so well taken care of as his pigs.

"If you can give me nothing else to do, sir,"
he said, looking straight at the Innkeeper and
smiling, "I shall be very glad to be your
Swineherd!"

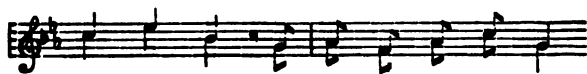
THE DANCE OF SPRING



CHAPTER XII

THE KING'S DAY

THE SONG OF THE BROOM-MAKER'S THIRTEEN CHILDREN



"Rah! Ri! Ro! In coach-es we will go!"

THE Innkeeper looked hard at the King's Son, and gave a little nod. He was a rough, common man, but he liked lads of spirit.

"Right!" said he, shortly. "You may begin work to-morrow."

And he shook hands with the King's Son.

A great shouting now arose in the crowd at the edges of the square. The Innkeeper turned to his tables and wine-kegs, and the Royal Swineherd was again left to his own devices.

"I suppose I can do it if I try," he reflected.

"I said I would, and I will. But—a Swineherd! All right! Good - by, King's Son, and enter, Swineherd!"

He laughed to himself and sat down under the linden - tree, his thought slipping back again and again to his strange Dream. He did not hear what the crowd was shouting, and if he had it would have meant nothing to him.

"Long live the Wood-cutter! Long live the Broom-maker!" they cried. "Hurrah!"

"Hurrah!" shrilled the Stable-Maid, waving a dish-cloth. "And hurrah for the Broom-maker's thirteen children!"

"Yes, just listen to them!" chuckled the Inn-keeper. "What is it they are yelling?"

A sound of children's singing came nearer and nearer, and as the laughing people made way before them the Broom-maker's large family came trooping into the square.

The little Broom-maker was strutting along with great pride, for he and the Wood-cutter were persons of vast importance upon this, the King's Day. Were they not the bearers of the Witch's Prophecy to the citizens of Hella-

brunn? You may be sure they meant to make the most of that fact.

The thirteen children ranged in ages from three to fifteen, and they were wonderfully nice and pretty little people, when one considers how horrid their father was. The Broom-maker's arms were full of brooms, newly made, for he thought that his children ought to be able to sell a great many on the King's Day. The young folk themselves were in the merriest spirits, and skipped along gaily, caroling away at the tops of their voices. When they reached the middle of the square they took hands and danced around in a ring singing a little song which they had made up themselves:

“Rah! Ri! Ro!
In coaches we will go!
And if on coaches we can't count,
Upon our broom-sticks we will mount
And gallop to and fro!

“Ri! Ro! Ray!
This is the new King's Day!
He's coming soon,
This very noon,
Ri! Ro! Ray!”

The Broom-maker's children were all attractive-looking, but one of them was really pretty. She was a little girl about nine years old, with fair hair and shy, sweet manners. She was a pet of our friend the Fiddler; indeed, every one was fond of her, and the King's Son noticed her particularly.

When they had finished singing, they gathered around the Broom-maker, who handed them each a broom and gave them their instructions.

"Now, listen carefully!" he said. "When the bells toll twelve the King's carriage and train of attendants will enter the City. Then you must all run out and cry your wares very loud, so that His Majesty will be sure to hear you. Push your way through the crowd, and the minute you see the King in his coach call out at the tops of all your lungs: '*This is the King's Day! Buy a King's Broom! This is the King's Day! Buy a King's Broom!*' Do you hear me?"

The thirteen children nodded and cried, "This is the King's Day! Buy a King's Broom!"

to show that they understood. Then they ran off among the people, carrying their brooms, and calling "Buy-a-broom! Buy-a-broom!" in sing-song voices, as usual. Some housewives bought, and others did not, but the Broom-maker's children had a good time anyway.

Now along came that horrid, sly, and thoroughly unpleasant person, the Wood-cutter. He was putting on even more airs than the Broom-maker, walking along very slowly and proudly, with pompous steps, and holding his head exceedingly high.

The Innkeeper was an old friend of his—in fact, the Wood-cutter owed him money. But, of course, the bearer of the Witch's message would have nothing to say to the simple landlord of a tavern. So he stalked by without even looking at the Innkeeper, who promptly and gruffly shouted to him to stop.

"Wood-cutter! Hey! Wood-cutter!"

The Wood-cutter paused, in an unwilling fashion. He stared at the Innkeeper coldly, and said: "Ah, Friend Innkeeper, so it is you!

I—h'm, h'm!—" he fumbled in his pocket. "I believe I am a trifle in your debt!"

He hated to pay out money, but this time he feared that he would have to do so. He put a gold-piece down on the table. It was one of those which the Councilors had paid the two on their return the night before, and he found it heartbreaking to part with it. But he laid it down as though he were quite used to gold-pieces, and looked at it and then at the Innkeeper with a lordly air.

"There!" said he. "There, sir!"

The Innkeeper felt somewhat better tempered when he saw the money. He had given up all hope of being paid.

"Oh, well, there was no great hurry!" he said, smiling, but keeping his eye on the gold-piece.

The Wood-cutter waved his hand.

"Say no more, fellow!" he exclaimed, haughtily. "I expect to be high in the favor of the new King, and a gold-piece more or less is nothing to me!"

"Well, then," said the Innkeeper, with his

comfortable, fat chuckle, "we'll drink a bumper or two with it. Some of my best wine here, and make haste!" he called to the Bar-Maid, motioning to her secretly to water it well.

During the moment that his back was turned the Wood-cutter quietly picked up the coin and put it back in his pocket. Did you ever hear of quite such a sly, mean man as he?

"Now," said the Innkeeper, turning around again, "I'll take your money, and welcome,—Eh? It's gone!"

He stared at the bare table as though he could not believe his eyes. There was not a sign of a gold-piece there. He stooped to look more closely, glanced under the table, and gasped with surprise.

"Does the table leak?" he cried.

"It was there just now," said the Wood-cutter, calmly. "Some one must have stolen it—and on the King's Day, too!"

He pretended to be much horrified.

"How terrible!" he sighed. "How shameful! If I could catch the thief I certainly would give him a beating. Friend Innkeeper, I am

so sorry that you have lost your gold-piece!" And he strutted away, fingering the stolen coin in his pocket and smiling to himself.

The King's Son had watched all this with some amusement, but more disgust. He did not know who the Wood-cutter was, though he thought he looked vaguely familiar. But he could see plainly that he was a niggardly and dishonest man, and niggardliness and dishonesty were the two things which the King's Son could neither understand nor forgive. He did not interfere, however, but sat in silence under the linden-tree watching the merry-making and dreaming day-dreams.

Suddenly he heard a little voice close to him.

"You! Man!" it said, softly.

The King's Son turned in a quick, cross way, wishing angrily that these people would let him alone. But it was the Broom-maker's little daughter who stood beside him. She was the pretty, fair-haired one, and she was looking at him with big, blue eyes, and holding out her new broom, which was taller than she was. The King's Son began to smile.

"What is it, my child?" he asked, kindly.

The little fair girl hung her head. She was very shy.

"Buy-a-broom!" she said, in a very small voice. Then she remembered what her father had said, and she added: "This is the King's Day! Buy a King's Broom!"

Of course the Broom-maker had told her to wait until she saw the King before she said that. Was it not strange that she should have chanced to offer her wares to the King's Son?

"A King's Broom!" he repeated, still smiling, but somewhat puzzled. He was delighted with the Broom-maker's little daughter.

She nodded.

"My dear little girl," he said, taking her hand, "I can't buy the King's Broom, though I should like to." And he laughed. "I have no money!"

As he looked at her, her fair hair and gentle blue eyes reminded him of the Goose Girl, and he kissed the child.

"You pretty baby!" he said—for the Broom-

maker's Daughter was very little for her age.

"Won't you stay with me a moment?"

The little girl looked at him gravely, and then smiled. She liked the King's Son, and felt that they would be friends.

"Will you play with me?" she asked.

"Play what?" he said, finding her by far the nicest person he had met in Hella-brunn.

"'Ring-around-a-rosy,'" she told him.

In the Contented Kingdom the Prince had never played games that had to be played with other children, because there were no other children in the Kingdom of sufficiently high birth to play with him. So, poor boy, he knew nothing of "Ring-around-a-rosy."

"How do you play it?" he asked, meekly.

The Broom-maker's Daughter danced slowly and seriously around in front of him.

"So!" she declared. "Round—and round—and round—"

The King's Son laughed outright.

"I never could play that!" he exclaimed.

"Then you must be *quite* stupid!" said the

Broom-maker's Daughter, not rudely, but simply and pityingly.

"You yellow-haired rogue!" he cried, merrily.
"You will have to teach me!"

The Broom-maker's Daughter took his hands and led him around in a circle, while she sang the rhyme to which the Hellabrunn children played the game of "Ring-around-a-rosey." And this was what she sang:

"Ring-around-a-rose-bush red!
My mother gaily decked me!
A Gosling chased me while I fled,
And tore my frock and pecked me!
On a stool my mother sat me,
While the Goose was laughing at me!
Ring-around-a-rose-bush red—"

But the King's Son was not paying strict enough attention to suit the Broom-maker's little daughter.

"That isn't nearly all!" she said, severely.
"You have to duck down there. And then you say, 'Hush! Hush!'—so. And then you do ever so many other things!"

She explained that and other games very

carefully, and the King's Son was really interested and amused, and entirely charmed with his little new friend. As they played together he felt younger and gayer than he could remember ever feeling as a child. And the Broom-maker's Daughter thought that this big boy was very much the nicest that she had ever known.

A little ripple of excitement was passing through the crowd by the City Gate. Voices were heard on all sides saying that the Councilors and other important men of the town were drawing near. Officers with heavy pikes appeared, pushing the people back and clearing a way to the Tribunal. The townspeople murmured together, but every one was serious now. Noon was near, and all Hellabrunn was deeply interested in what was to happen next.

Then the Councilors arrived, dressed in rich, black velvet robes, with black caps and heavy golden chains. They were all dignified men of middle age or older. With them walked their wives and daughters, the great ladies of

the City, arrayed in beautiful silks and rare jewelry, with the queerly shaped head-dresses of the day.

One of the Councilors, the chief of them, in fact, for whom all had the greatest reverence, was extremely old. His beard was long and white, and he tottered as he walked. He entered the square leaning on the arms of two attendants, and people whispered about him respectfully as he was helped on to the platform and into the seat of honor. When the entire Council had found their places in the Tribunal the people broke into cheers:

"Long live the Councilors! Long live the Burgomasters of Hellabrunn! They will give us a ruler! Hail to the King! Hail to the Council! Hurrah! Hurrah!"

The King's Son and the Broom-maker's Daughter stopped their play to watch what was going on. This, too, looked rather like a game to the Prince—this excited gathering of townsfolk and the talk of finding a King at noon, by accident as it were. He thought of

the noble ceremonies in his Kingdom, the whole-hearted celebrations and awe-inspiring pageants, when the King of the realm was crowned. And he smiled. Then he noticed that a complete hush had fallen over the square, and that the aged Chief Councilor was rising feebly to speak.

"Dear and kind people of Hellabrunn Town," he began, in a very faint, high voice.

Nobody could hear him. They frowned and grumbled to one another, and some of the more daring persons cried out: "Louder! Louder!"

"Might as well try to hear the grass grow!" muttered some one.

"I am the oldest of the Councilors," the old man quavered on, "the last of those who knelt in farewell homage beside the old King's bed. When he died, my friends, it was I who closed his eyes. He was a good man, a noble sovereign, a great master." He wiped away a tear and shook his head.

The crowd was getting somewhat restless.

They did not want to hear about the old King, but the new one; and the ancient Councilor bored them. More than one voice could be heard in undertones complaining that this prosy old person was going to talk forever.

"As you know," rambled on the Councilor, "we sent to the Wise Woman of the Wood. We sent the Wood-cutter—"

At this point the impatience became too strong to restrain.

"Yes, yes!" cried several voices. "The Wood-cutter! Let the Wood-cutter tell us!"

"So be it then!" said the old Councilor. "Let the Wood-cutter stand forward!"

And then, as with one voice, the whole Town Council rose and spoke impressively:

"Stand still, all men, and listen well! We are forthwith to hear the message from the Wise Woman of the Wood—the Prophecy which announces to us our future King! Even now the hour approaches; even now he is drawing near; suddenly he will be at the City Gate.

The King's Day

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Listen well, people of Hellabrunn! It is the
King's Day!"

"RING-AROUND-A-ROSE-BUSH RED"



CHAPTER XIII

HELLABRUNN AND THE KING'S SON

TWO HELLABRUNN THEMES



THE Wood-cutter walked to the clear space in front of the Tribunal, and bowed solemnly, first to the Council and then to the people. The King's Son moved forward to listen, and the Broom-maker's little girl ran off to find her brothers and sisters.

"Burghers and fellow-townsmen," said the Wood-cutter, after much clearing of his throat, "I can tell you that we had a hard, rough journey through the Witch's Wood!"

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You see, he wanted to arouse as much interest as possible, and he had made up his mind to tell a story which, even if it were not quite true, would be certain to hold the attention of his hearers.

"We were in very great danger," he went on, after pausing to see the effect of his words. "Wolves and bears, with long, shaggy fur, black boar and wild cattle, and every other kind of savage beast prowled on our path, snorting and panting on all sides of us."

He was pleased to see that this shocking falsehood impressed everybody. But just as he was about to begin again the King's Son stepped forward, and said, politely:

"I beg your pardon, friend, but while I was passing through the Forest yesterday I think that I saw you go by at a little distance—you and your comrade there." And he pointed to the Broom-maker. "It seemed to me that you were having no great trouble then. So far as one could see, you appeared to be getting along quite easily."

The Wood-cutter glared at him, and the

Prince added, "There was a third fellow with you—a big chap who strode far in the front, and played on his fiddle, while he sang a strange song with a very good tune to it."

Everybody looked surprised, for they had forgotten all about the Fiddler. Now they remembered that he certainly had started out from Hellabrunn with the others. For the first time they began to wonder what had become of him. Was it possible that this stranger-lad had really seen the three messengers in the Wood?

But the Wood-cutter was furious. He did not want to talk about the Fiddler. The Council might insist on taking back a third of the gold to keep for him; besides, what business had this ragged, shabby upstart to interrupt him—*him*, the Wood-cutter!—in the middle of his narrative! The Wood-cutter choked with anger.

"What is he taking about?" he demanded, fiercely. "He doesn't know what he is saying!"

"But it is true what he says; the Fiddler *did* go with you!" spoke up a little man near by.

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He was a tailor, and a very timid, humble creature, but he was obstinate, like many small, weak persons. "Where is the Fiddler, anyway?"

"The Fiddler! The Fiddler!" raged the Wood-cutter, beside himself with temper. "I can tell you that your Fiddler is not worth chopping up for sausage! A lot of good *he* was! If you could only have heard him talking to the Witch!"

The last word acted like a bit of the old hag's own magic; everybody began to talk at once:

"The Witch! Yes, yes—the Witch! That's it! Tell us the message—tell us what the Witch said! Quick, quick! Wood-cutter! Broom-maker! What did the Wise Woman tell you? What was the Witch's Prophecy?"

The Wood-cutter could not remember the strange rhyme which the Witch had repeated in the dusky clearing, but the substance of it was still ringing in his head together with the echoes of the ghostly bells, which even his stupid brain could not entirely forget. He

drew himself up, and in a very loud, impressive tone he cried:

*"When the noon bells ring,
Then comes the King!"*

There was great excitement for a minute or two, and the Wood-cutter and the Broom-maker held up their heads more loftily than ever.

The Broom-maker now spoke, gathering courage from the important position held for the moment by the Wood-cutter and himself.

"The King is coming soon," he cried. "And we shall go out to meet him, and swear to be loyal to him!"

"Yes, yes!" cried the people, eagerly. "We shall all go out to meet him and he will give us all our hearts' desires!"

But the King's Son was now too much interested to merely listen and wait with the others. He was used to asking questions when he was curious, so he promptly approached the Wood-cutter and the Broom-maker.

"Did I understand you aright, good sirs?"

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he asked. "Is a stranger Prince coming to the City?"

"Well, that's as may be!" said the Woodcutter, crossly, yet pleased to be asked for information. "It might be a Princess. It would be all the same!"

The King's Son listened, amazed. Never had he heard of such a thing in the Contented Kingdom. These people did not know whether a King or Queen was to rule over them!

"A descendant of Kings is coming to us!" declared the Councilor. "A Royal Child shall have our Kingdom for his own. What do we care who he be, so that he be royal!"

A new and rather overpowering thought came to the King's Son. Here was a realm of people eagerly waiting for a King. And here among them was a King—a Prince, born and bred to the Throne—a Royal Child! A Kingdom was going begging—lying at his feet, it seemed. Should he take it and keep it and care for it? Should he who had run away from his own subjects accept the rulership of

this stranger country? Should he who had thrown away his rightful Crown place on his head the Crown of Hella? Yes or no? Once he had said that one who had been born a Prince ought to be able to make himself a King.

. . . Was it his fancy that the mysterious spell of his Dream seemed to be coming over him once more? It was as though he were apart from these chattering people, surrounded by faint echoes of very distant bells. . . .

Suddenly his thoughts cleared. He heard the Wood-cutter speaking. That worthy man had decided that he had remembered all that was needed of the Witch's Prophecy. Now he was going to try a little inventing of his own. And this is what he said:

"The King is coming in a gorgeous royal coach with splendid horses! His robes will be sewn with gold and silver and precious stones! For seven hundred years people will talk of his magnificence."

Do you remember what the Witch had really said, towering over the men in the weird twi-

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light, and striking terror to their hearts with her magical power?

*"Even a vagrant in ragged state,
'Tis he that shall be your King!"*

You see! "Even a vagrant!" *Even a vagrant!* Even one as poorly clad, as unknown, as empty of purse as the King's Son himself! He was the one for whom they waited—or might be. Yes, that was what the Witch had said. But the Wood-cutter had forgotten it. It had not seemed worth remembering to him, you see; he did not understand.

Neither did the people of Hellabrunn understand. Of course it appeared quite natural to them that their King should come in royal state. They could not imagine a Sovereign on foot. They were not very clever people, anyway, and their imaginations were badly trained.

So they all shouted:

"Hurrah! He is coming in a royal coach! Hurrah!"

And the Broom-maker's thirteen children pranced around in a circle and loudly sang:

"Rah! Ri! Ro!
How merrily we'll go!
Sweet cowslip wine we'll all drink up,
And crumble cake within the cup!
Rah! Ri! Ro!"

And everybody shouted: "Long live the King! Long live the King!" and laughed and waved their hands, and shouted again.

But the King's Son was grave.

"But suppose your King did not happen to come in a royal coach?" he said, gently; and for some reason every one who heard him stopped talking and laughing to listen more closely. "Suppose he came in a different fashion—even in rags and old shoes? Could you not welcome a King even if he were on foot and wore poor clothes?"

His listeners looked puzzled. They wondered what this odd boy could be talking about.

"How could we tell, then, that he *was* the King?" said the little Tailor.

The King's Son drew himself up haughtily.

"Anybody with eyes could recognize a King, whatever he wore!" he said, rather contemptuously.

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The fat, coarse-looking Innkeeper gave a hoarse chuckle at this last speech of his new servant.

"From the airs some people put on," he said, "you can't always tell a King from a—Swine-herd!"

And he laughed till his stout body shook.

The people were chattering loudly together. The sun had climbed and climbed until it stood nearly in mid-heaven.

"Our King is going to do everything we want!" cried voices on all sides. "He will make everybody happy, and we shall be grateful to him, and all the Kingdom will be satisfied!"

The King's Son looked at the plump, stupid, comfortable people around him, and thought that they needed some one to make them *dissatisfied*—some one to wake them up!

"Is it a make-believe King that you want, then?" he said, with a short laugh. "A puppet? Some one who will always do what you want, whether it is good for you or not? You silly people! What would you do if a *real* King should come to rule you?"

"Oh, it is all quite simple!" he was told.

"The King will have to meet the wishes of the Council, and of course the Council understands what *we* want it to do!"

"Why, then," cried the King's Son, in a ringing tone, "you do not know what a King is!"

"Oho!" said the Wood-cutter, spitefully. "And of course you do, eh?"

The boy had forgotten that he was a Swineherd, a wanderer, a penniless beggar—forgotten that he was anything or ever had been anything but a King's Son.

"Your King will make you build castles and become great," he said to them, slowly. "He will teach you to become wise, and free, and powerful. He will bring light to the whole Kingdom, and lift you and your country high—high—until the world admires you. That is what a true King will do!"

This was greeted by a shout of laughter.

"Poor fool!" they cried. "What nonsense! Why, hear him! Oh, he's mad, of course!"

As for the Innkeeper, he laughed until the tears ran down his fat cheeks and he was so weak he had to sit down on a bench.

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"Laugh away!" said the King's Son, growing pale with anger, as he heard their mirth. "Laugh like that when your King comes to be crowned!"

There was one person who had been watching and listening with breathless interest. It was the Innkeeper's Daughter. She had not forgotten her threat to punish the beggar youth who had refused to be patronized, and who had said that a Goose Girl was prettier than she. It occurred to her that he was evidently without friends in Hellabrunn, and that, if she tried, she might get him into real trouble. She sidled up to the Innkeeper.

"Father," said she, in a low voice, "keep your eye on that fellow. He may try to slip away without paying us!"

Paying and not paying were always serious matters to the Innkeeper, so he stopped laughing at once.

"Here!" he called to the King's Son. "Pay up!"

The King's Son faced him in astonishment.

"I haven't bought anything!" he said.

The Innkeeper's Daughter smiled at him in an extremely disagreeable manner.

"Have you forgotten the pork and cabbage?" she remarked. "And the wine?"

The King's Son looked at her so steadily that she felt a little ashamed and dropped her eyes.

"I asked you for nothing," he said, quietly. "I could not eat it, as you know, and — I thanked you."

He turned away. But, though she said no more, the Innkeeper stopped him again.

"We don't want your thanks!" he said, roughly. "I want my money!"

The King's Son turned his wallet inside out, said "Empty!" briefly, and strolled away with his back to the Innkeeper.

The fat man choked with rage.

"Thief and cheat!" he cried. "He is trying to get away without paying his count! Stop him! Stop thief!"

In a moment the square was in wild confusion. Without knowing what the boy had done, all these horrid Hellabrunn people were against him, because he was young, because

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he was a stranger, and because they liked to be cruel and hated to be just.

"Stop thief!" they shouted. "He's a robber! He's a pickpocket! Thrash him! Cudgel him! Stop thief!"

And they pressed around him, shaking their fists, and hooting with excitement.

"He stole my gold-piece! I know he did!" roared the Wood-cutter, pulling out the short axe that he wore in his belt. "I'll chop him in pieces!"

"I'll sweep him into the dust-bin!" cried the Broom-maker, waving a new broom.

"I'll cut him in two pieces!" squeaked the Tailor, taking out his big shears.

"I'll mince him for hash!" howled the Inn-keeper, pounding on the table with his fat fists, and growing every moment more purple with rage.

The King's Son clasped his hand to his sword. His cap had fallen off, and the blazing sun of noonday beat on his head like liquid fire. . . . The sun of noonday! . . . The thought drifted through his brain, even in that excited moment. What was it that they had said about

noon? . . . The angry faces crowded in closer. He was one against the Town—but he was the King's Son, so he laughed as he faced them. He grasped the handle of the King's Sword. . . .

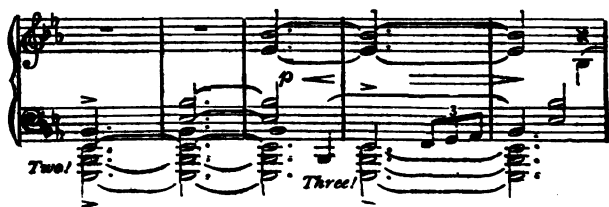
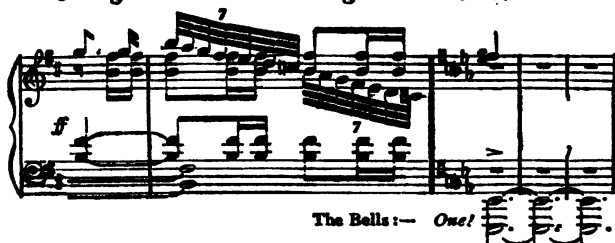
A slow, magnificent boom echoed across the square. And silence fell like death upon the clamor.

Another—and every one drew a long, quivering breath.

It was the Stroke of Noon!

THE TUMULT OF THE BELLS

"Cud-gel him! Cud-gel him!"



CHAPTER XIV

THE STROKE OF TWELVE

THE GOOSE GIRL AT THE CITY GATE

The music of her entrance into Hellabrunn is the repetition, first, of the theme heard when she saw her face in the spring; and second, of the melody to which the King's Son asked her to be his Lady. In one of the two motifs there is a little echo of the Witch's Prophecy as well. Can you find it?



CLANG!

The third note had sounded. The crowd surged toward the Gate, but the keepers pushed them steadily back.

Clang!

"Mid-day!" said the Councilors, solemnly. "Peace there! Let all stand back from the King's way!"

Clang!

Broken whispers were heard: "The bells! The bells! What is going to happen? It is noon! They are the bells of noon!"

Clang!

Once more the King's Son could breathe. His hand dropped from his sword-hilt. He stood motionless in the center of the square. No one noticed him now. All eyes were fixed on the Gate; all thoughts were set on the coming of the unknown sovereign.

Clang!

In the brain of the King's Son those splendid bells rang like an echo, a memory, a dream. . . . That was it! It was like his Dream come true! So had the bells clanged through the

Dream, before the mysterious blaze of sunshine, before. . . .

Clang!

"Could it be going to happen?" he murmured to himself, half aloud. "Can she be coming out of the dew and the morning—the dear little girl from the forest clearing? Will she be followed by her white Geese? Will her kerchief be gone, and her yellow hair fall about her? It is too impossible! And yet—and yet—it seems—"

Clang!

"Let my little girl stand in front!" whispered one of the women.

"Why she more than another?" demanded the Tailor, without moving.

Clang!

Every one listened breathlessly.

"I hear the hoof-beats!" exclaimed the Wood-cutter, who really thought he did.

"And the noise of wheels!" added the Broom-maker, excitedly.

The Gate-keepers turned to the huge doors and lifted the heavy bolts. There was not a

sound in the square except the fluttering of the people's breaths and the echo of the bells.

Clang!

The bolt was withdrawn. The two Gatekeepers raised their hands to the fastening. Time seemed to stand still for a moment.

Clang! And the twelfth stroke.

The great doors swung open.

And there, with her white Geese about her, and the Crown upon her gold-colored hair, stood the little Goose Girl in the sun!

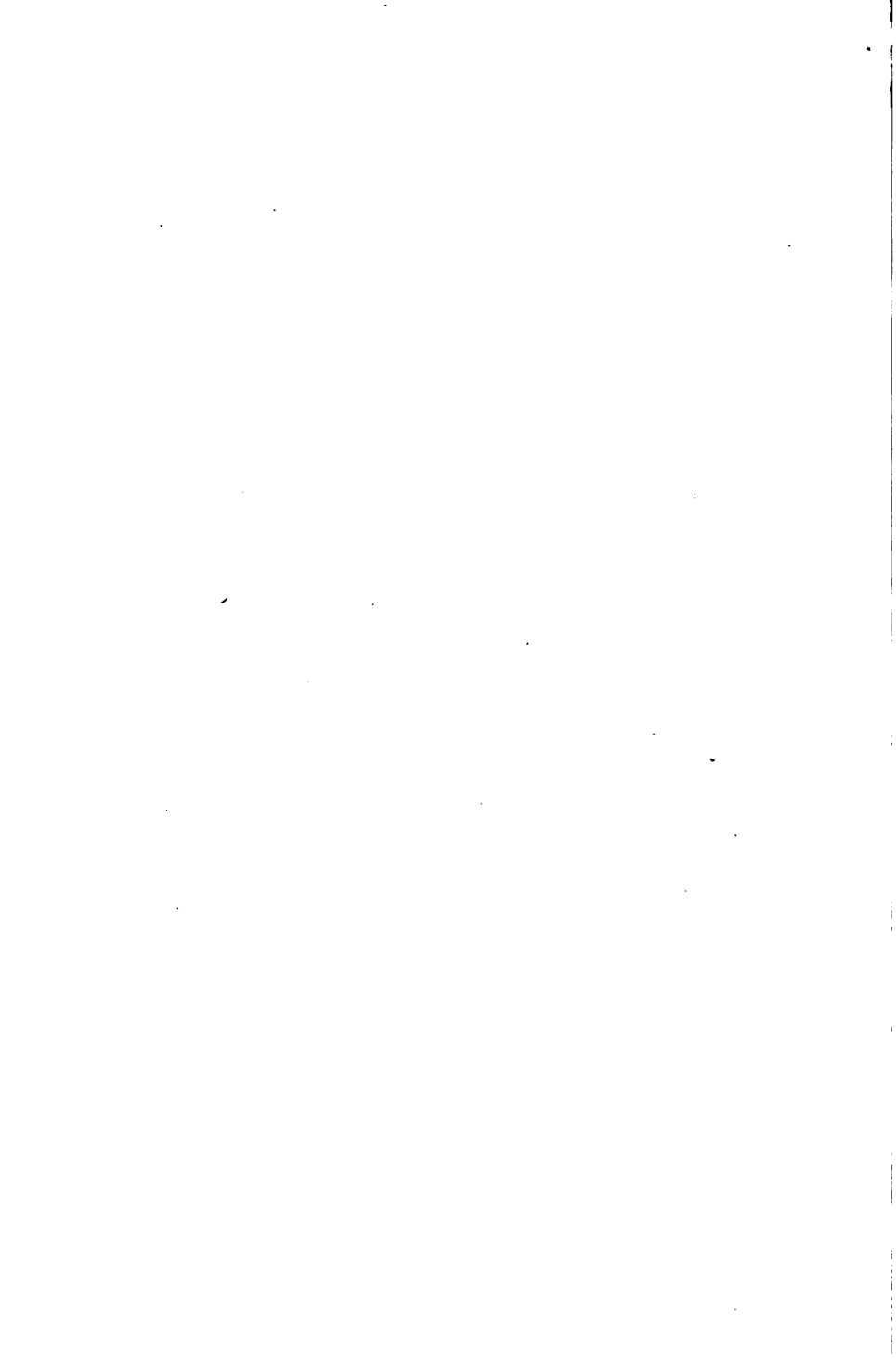
Behind her stretched the bright highway, all golden in the noon light, the green woods and the flower-filled fields, and the distant grandeur of the Wonderful Mountains. Her Geese looked like snow; her Crown looked like flame, and she herself, in her beauty and grace and sweetness, appeared as fair and perfect a little Princess as ever came to a City Gate.

So had she looked in the Dream. So had the big bells pealed and died away. So had the sunlit vision broken upon him.

"True!" breathed the King's Son, looking at her. "My Dream come true!"



SHE WENT STRAIGHT TO THE KING'S SON



The puzzled people still stood silent, not knowing what to say or do. They could not understand what it all meant. The Goose Girl had never seen a multitude before; it was her first glimpse of Mortals. But although she had been so shy and timid all her life, she was brave now, for with all her heart she wanted to be truly royal.

And though she was terrified by all these crowds of waiting folk with unfriendly faces, and by the strangeness and novelty of everything in the world, she smiled fearlessly. And, looking very sweet and stately, she walked quietly into the Town of Hellabrunn!

She went straight up to the King's Son, who stood silently waiting for her.

"Dear lad," said the Goose Girl, in her clear, gentle voice, "I have come after all. I was afraid, but now I have stopped being a coward, and shall not be any more. I have found good courage and a light heart, and you see I am not even afraid to wear your Crown."

The King's Son felt suddenly very proud—more proud than he had ever felt before.

Nothing that had happened to him seemed at all important compared to the facts that the Goose Girl trusted and cared for him, that she had come to find him, and that one day they would be married and reign together.

"I knew you would come," he said, simply, but with shining eyes. He went up to her, and she put out her hand timidly. But, instead of taking it, he went down on his knee and said softly, "Your Majesty!"

So there stood the Goose Girl, frightened but pleased, a little pale but smiling, with a big, gold Crown on her head and the King's Son kneeling at her feet. What a pair of Royal Children, and how good to look at! But the people of Hellabrunn—ah! Could *they* have been expected to appreciate how kingly they looked, or how noble they were?

As the Goose Girl stood there in the sun, and the King's Son knelt before her, a shout of laughter went up that filled the streets for blocks around with its harsh echoes.

"A Goose Girl!" screamed the people of Hellabrunn. "Look at her! Only look at her

Geese! And her skirt is patched! And she has no stockings! A Goose Girl! That's what we've been waiting for! Oh, ha, ha, ha, ha! A Goose Girl, to be sure!"

All Hellabrunn seemed to ring with that mocking amusement.

The Councilors did not laugh; they were indignant. They felt that they had been tricked by the Witch who had made the prophecy, and by the Goose Girl who had dared to take advantage of it. They stood in the Tribunal, puzzled and vastly displeased.

"A Goose Girl to be Queen!" they exclaimed. "Impossible! What does it all mean? If it is a joke, it is a very ill-timed one!"

The people had not yet had time to be angry. They were still too mirthful.

Their attention was drawn for a moment from the boy and girl in the center of the square by a big, friendly voice from the Gateway.

"May I say a word?" cried the Fiddler.

He had kept back, out of sight, that the little Goose Girl might enter the Kingdom alone.

But he was close at hand all the while, and now he strode in, smiling cheerfully at everybody. He carried his fiddle slung to his shoulder, his cap was a bit on side, and he was evidently well pleased with the world.

But his look changed when he saw the scornful and sneering faces around the two young people whom he wished to befriend. He was distressed—even shocked. He was something of a poet, was the Fiddler, a lover of Fairy Folk, and a believer in signs and wonders. He could hardly believe that these Hellabrunn citizens would be such dunces as to refuse to acknowledge the Goose Girl as Queen. He knew what the Witch's Prophecy had been. Was it possible that the City would pay no attention to it? Was it possible that they would dare to laugh at the maiden sent to them in such a wonderful and impressive way? The Goose Girl stood quite bravely among them, shrinking slightly from the loud laughter, the pointing fingers, the merciless eyes, and the cruel jests—but holding her head high. She kept forcing herself to remember that only

peasants were cowards, and that she was wearing a Crown.

The King's Son was on his feet now, his face growing darker and darker as he faced their tormentors.

Foremost among the scoffing folk was the Innkeeper's Daughter. She saw that the King's Son had told the truth: the Goose Girl *was* prettier than she, and she hated her for it. Her laughter was the shrillest of all.

"A common, ragged wench! A serving-maid! A beggar-girl!" she shrieked. "The Fiddler is making game of you, take my word for it! She came with him, and *he* is nothing but a vagrant and an outlaw!"

"It is a gang of thieves!" bellowed the Woodcutter, breaking in savagely. "That tattered boy there is working with her, and the Fiddler, too! They are banded together to trick and cheat us!"

The shouts became fiercer, and there was less laughter. Hellabrunn was beginning to be offended. They had planned to welcome a King or Queen, and these beggars, these com-

mon, wandering rogues, were making a jest of them!

Their faces grew ugly, and there were mutterings of anger.

The Fiddler raised his hand sharply.

"Fools!" he cried, violently. "Can you not understand? Do you not see the Crown?"

"If they've a Crown they've stolen it!" snarled one man. And others caught up the cry:

"Stolen! Stolen! They are both thieves! We knew it from the first!"

"Shall we endure it?" demanded the Woodcutter, roughly. "Shall we stand this trick? Shall we, the Burghers of Hellabrunn, we the Citizens, we the Tradesmen, let ourselves be made a mock of by these rascals? Neighbors and good wives, shall we bear it?"

"No! No!" shouted the rest, and made a rush for the two young people.

But the King's Son was ready, with his sword in his hand, and his eyes blazing.

"Have a care!" he cried, in a new voice. "This is the Queen! Do not so much as touch

a fold of her gown, or you shall feel the King's Sword!"

The Goose Girl pressed close to him, but she did not cry nor tremble. She only grew very, very white. Was this, then, what it meant to be royal and to wear a Crown?

"A Royal Pair!" sneered the Innkeeper; but he kept out of the way of the King's Sword.

"The Goose Girl and the Beggar Boy!" cried the Innkeeper's Daughter, with glittering eyes.

"With the Geese for subjects!" chuckled the Stable-maid. The poor Stable-maid! She was not ill-natured, but, of course, she thought it all a very great joke.

The Fiddler faced them, filled with honest fervor and indignation.

"You idiots! You madmen!" he exclaimed, in his big, deep tones. "Are you as blind as all that? Can't one of you tell the blood and spirit of Kings when you see it?" His voice checked the hubbub for a moment. "Do you not know," he thundered, "that these are Royal Children?"

There was a second's pause. Then a little

voice, very clear and high, spoke up from the depths of the crowd.

"Long live the King!" called the Broom-maker's Daughter.

The King's Son felt his lips quiver. No other voice echoed the loyal cry.

Instead, the tumult broke out more fiercely than ever. The rage of the people spent itself first upon the Fiddler. They seized him, and bound him, with shouts of anger.

"You'll be locked up in a dungeon! You'll be locked up in a dungeon!" cried the Broom-maker, jumping up and down in wild excitement and spiteful joy.

The Fiddler struggled furiously with the men who held him, but he was one against many, and in spite of his great size and strength he was finally overpowered and dragged away.

So the King's Son and the Goose Girl lost their last friend. For the Broom-maker's Daughter could only say, "Long live the King!"

They stood among the muttering, wrathful people, poor boy and girl,—very pale, but quite

brave and proud. The Crown was still on her head, and he still held the King's Sword.

The Councilors were all on their feet in the Tribunal. One raised his hand, and there was silence.

"The Festival is over!" was the word of the Council of the Town.

The people spoke as though with one voice:

"And what shall we do with the 'Royal Children?'"

The answer of the Councilors came sternly:

"Drive them out of the City!"

There was a shriek of cruel delight. The Council told them to do just what they were longing to do. The whole crowd turned upon the King's Son and the Goose Girl and swept them to the great Gate and through it. The air was filled with stones, sticks, everything that could be thrown.

So, pushed, beaten, pelted, stoned, insulted, the Royal Children were driven out of the Town, and the loud, merciless voices echoed in their ears as they stumbled down the high-

road in the hot sun. The King's Sword was clutched uselessly in the Prince's hand; the Crown was heavy on her head. They were overcome, driven forth, beggars and outcasts henceforward.

And that was how the people of Hellabrunn treated the Royal Children who had been sent by destiny to reign over them.

In the square by the City Gate there was soon no one left but the Broom-maker's little daughter and the aged Councilor, who could not walk as fast as the others.

The child was crouching on the steps of the Tribunal, crying as though her heart would break.

The old man stopped beside her and laid his hand upon her shoulder.

"What is the matter, little girl?" he asked, kindly. "Why do you cry like that? Have you lost one of your brooms?"

"No," said the Broom-maker's Daughter, sobbing. "I am crying because it was the King and Queen you drove away."

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THE END OF THE KING'S DAY, WHEN THE ECHOES OF
THE MAGIC BELLS AND THE WITCH'S PROPH-
ECY JANGLED OUT OF TUNE



PART III
THE FOREST

CHAPTER XV

THE SORROWS OF THE FIDDLER

WHEN WINTER CAME TO THE MAGIC WOOD



A GREAT many things happened after the Royal Children were stoned out of the City of Hellabrunn. The townspeople were very much excited and upset by their disappointment on the King's Day. The Council had really encouraged instead of checking their cruelty, and it seemed to go to their heads. I think that they were all of them half mad for a time. Mobs of people do get crazed sometimes, you know, and then there are Revolutions and other horrors. That was the way with the people of Hellabrunn.

There was no one to make them stop, for the Council had allowed them to drive out the Royal Children, and after that they had no more respect for the Council. So they did some dreadful things, and were hideously miserable, as Cities, like persons, are when they are wicked.

There were only two deeds of theirs that concern us. The first was the burning of the Witch.

They killed her, because they said she was not a true Wise Woman, and had made a foolish and misleading Prophecy. And that only shows how utterly stupid they were. For if they had heeded the Prophecy, the Royal Children would have ruled over them, and Hella-brunn would have been peaceful and good instead of restless and cruel.

Anyway, they burned her up—the bad old Witch, who had harmed so many Mortals in her day, who had lived for evil and darkness alone, who had ill-treated the Goose Girl, and put out her Star, but who had been a Wise Woman nevertheless, and had sent a truthful Prophecy to Hellabrunn.

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So there was an end of *her*.

The Fiddler was locked up in a dungeon, as the Broom-maker had declared he would be. There was no just charge against him, but these citizens did not care whether they were just or not. This sort of trouble always comes when there is no proper government—as you can tell when you read the history books.

They ill-treated the poor Fiddler, starved him, and abused him most grievously. And if it had not been for his great strength and his brave heart he would have died from weakness and from sheer discouragement. He grew gray and bowed, like an old, old man, and he could only walk with a limp, for he had been so cruelly used that one leg would always be lame. He never despaired, however, but waited patiently to be set free.

He did not have his fiddle to comfort him, for he had managed to give it secretly into a friend's keeping. But he knew that if he ever should get out of the dungeon he could play on it again. He often thought of it, and he sang his favorite airs softly to himself in the prison.

He was, as I have said, half starved, for his jailers often forgot to give him even the bread and water which were necessary to keep him alive. But the Broom-maker's little fair-haired daughter used to creep to the prison secretly and give him food through the bars. She would cry to see him there, and they would talk softly together. Then she would steal away as quietly as she had come; and no one ever knew of her visits to the dungeon.

The Fiddler had one thought always before him, which kept him from brooding over his own troubles. He was worrying about the Royal Children, and wondering where they were. The Broom-maker's Daughter had told him the terrible story of how they were stoned out of Hellabrunn. The very idea of it filled him with rage and pain. And he knew that they were without friends, without shelter, and without money; and he feared that they must need him sorely.

You see, the dear Fiddler was used to being needed; and he thought it likely that they had greater need of him than any one had ever had

before. The thought that he could not help nor comfort them in their distress was a steady grief to the good and generous man. He determined to go at once in search of them as soon as he should be free.

But when at last the cruel townspeople set him at liberty it was winter, and the hillside was white with snow.

Now that he was in truth free, he did not know how to look nor where to go. Here in the Town, where he had fiddled and sung and told tales for so many years, he was an outcast, a stranger. People would not look at him nor speak to him, partly because they could not understand him, and therefore distrusted him, and partly because they were ashamed of having treated him badly.

When he asked questions about the Royal Children he was met with silence. He was frantically angry with them for giving him no tidings; but, as a matter of fact, they knew no more of the unlucky girl and boy they had driven away than he did. More than one remorseful Burgher had made searching in-

quiries along the highroad, and the Broom-maker's Daughter had called and called through the outskirts of the woods, but nothing could be learned concerning the Royal Children.

The Fiddler saw clearly enough that he was unwelcome in Hellabrunn. And so far as he was concerned, he asked nothing better than to say good-by to the Town forever. . . . Except the children! He would miss his small friends. But that could not be helped. He must go far away from this brainless and unkind City, and never see it again. And perhaps—who could say?—he might find his dear Royal Children.

He hunted out his fiddle, said good-by to the Broom-maker's Daughter, and left Hellabrunn. And as he passed out through the City Gate, he made a vow never to enter it again. Many people heard him make it. And they were glad to see him go. His bent form, his limp, his pale face, and his grizzled hair had been a reproach to them.

As for the Fiddler, he set his face to the mountainside, and started on his slow and

painful wanderings. Once more he climbed the steep and overgrown way that led to the Witch's Hut. But now the snow slipped under his foot. And the rocks by which he steadied himself were glare ice. Once more he pressed through the Enchanted Wood; but all the magic in the world could not keep the trees green in the bitter cold.

The Black Marsh was frozen over, and icicles hung from the bare boughs of the big trees. The hollows where the Witch had dug for roots and gathered herbs and toadstools were swept by snowy gales and heaped with dead leaves.

The Fiddler felt heart-sick as he toiled over the dreary way. The frost lay heavy on the land; what hope had he of tracing the King's Son and the Goose Girl in the snow? The great drifts would blot out their footsteps; the howling blasts would drown their voices; in the vast and terrible world of winter they would be lost. And he—how could he find them? He was lame and feeble, and suddenly old. He could not journey through this wild

forest seeking them by day and night without shelter and without food.

It was with a heavy heart that he found himself in the Witch's clearing again after so many months. Once it had been warm and green, and as lovely as it was lonely. The little Hut had been mysterious but interesting. He remembered waiting outside in the summer moonlight, with the suspicion of witchcraft and magic abroad. Now the water was frozen in the spring, and the tumble-down roof was full of ragged holes torn by the tempests. On all sides the still, white woods were wrapped in a melancholy hush. If there were any supernatural beings about, the Fiddler was sure that they must all be Ghosts, and Mist Folk, and sad-voiced Women of the Wind.

He could not say what instinct had led him to the Hut. He had had no hopes of finding it other than it was. It would serve as a bare shelter, no more. Yet here he resolved to stay. Where the wicked Witch had lived, an outcast from Mortal people—here the good Fiddler, also an outcast, would take up his dwelling.

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And here he did, in fact, make his home. From time to time he was seen by people from the Valley, for he was much given to wandering. But he never entered Hellabrunn. What food he had he got from the farming folk outside the City Gate and from travelers upon the highway. In exchange for these stray handfuls of grain, stale loaves, and cups of milk he gave due payment in the form of music. But he was no longer the Fiddler of the past, and his songs were mostly sad ones.

In the chilly, barren little Hut he would play to himself upon his beloved fiddle, strange, plaintive melodies that seemed like sorrowful voices singing of old dreams.

The Witch's favorite beasts, the Cat and the Raven, had disappeared. Perhaps they had gone to take service with another Sorceress. In any case, they had left the clearing. But the Little Gray Doves had stayed. Through the first frost and then the snowstorms they had clung to the trees they knew and loved, and day after day they had flown anxiously

about the Hut, hoping that their old friend, the Goose Girl, would wonderfully appear and feed them once more with crumbs and grain.

When the Fiddler came there to live they adopted him joyously. Every morning and evening they would flutter down to his doorstep to see what he had for them to eat. And there was always something. For the Fiddler loved birds as he loved all small things—as, most of all, he loved children.

He missed the friendship of the Hellabrunn children sadly, and often thought with tenderness and regret of the old stories he had told them and the quaint little songs he had sung.

And, if he could have known it, the children of Hellabrunn were mourning for him more deeply even than he for them. For very queer things had grown out of the troubles in Hella's capital: There was a Conspiracy among the children!

You know a Conspiracy means that a number of people are banded together for secret

ends; and certainly the Hellabrunn young folk were secret enough! I am afraid it was very naughty of them, but it is a fact that they had begun to regard all grown-up persons as outsiders—and rather nasty outsiders at that! They looked at them disapprovingly, whispered together in corners, and even disobeyed them occasionally in the coolest and most indifferent way.

And why did the little people of Hellabrunn behave so badly? Because the Grown-ups had stoned the Royal Children out of the Town, and had treated the dear Fiddler so cruelly that he had gone away forever. They could not forget these two dreadful things, and they talked about them to one another secretly until they could not forgive them either. You know they felt that the King's Son and the Goose Girl, being young themselves, had in some way belonged to them. And, of course, they were quite sure that the Fiddler did! And it seemed to them too heartless to be robbed at once of their dearest and best friend and of their boy King and girl Queen!

How touched the Fiddler would have been if he could have known that the Conspiracy of the Children—as the Hellabrunn Grown-ups called it—had just two ends in view: one to bring him back to the City; the other to find the poor youth and maiden who had been cast out in such a hard-hearted fashion. They even made up small search-parties, and hunted the woods around for signs of the lost ones. But they did not dare to go very far away from the houses and streets that they knew, and each time had to come sadly home with no prospect of success.

At last they found out that the Fiddler was living at the Witch's Hut, not so very far away. If they could only get some of their Grown-ups to go with them! They were quite certain that if they could see their old friend, they could induce him to come back to them again. And they were confident, too, that he would help them to find the Royal Children.

Well, they were so determined about it, these obstinate little people, that after a while the

Grown-ups found that they would have to think the matter over seriously. The worst of it was that they knew the Children were right! The citizens of Hellabrunn had behaved wickedly, and they began to wish, now, that they had granted the Witch's Prophecy one chance, and let the King's Son and the Goose Girl rule them—for a little while at least. As for the Fiddler, they were really sorry for the way they had acted toward him; and they knew besides that they would have no peace in the Town until the children had him back again.

And so it came about that a second party was sent out from Hellabrunn to climb to the Witch's dwelling.

Again it was headed by the Wood-cutter and the Broom-maker, who were a trifle meeker at present than they had been on the King's Day. But it was chiefly made up of children; children of all ages and all sorts; children that were nearly as big as the King's Son himself, and children much tinier than the Broom-maker's little daughter.

The Children of Hellabrunn were going to
call on their Fiddler.

TWO OF THE HELLABRUNN CHILDREN'S MELODIES



CHAPTER XVI

WINTER AT THE WITCH'S HUT

THE TUNE THE FIDDLER WAS PLAYING



ONCE more it was late afternoon in the clearing by the Hut. But now the sky was gray with heavy clouds, and the snow fell fast. The withered boughs sighed faintly in the wind; the air was cuttingly cold. Ice and snow, sadness and loneliness were everywhere. The Fiddler sat in the dark little hovel playing softly to himself. Such a strange, sobbing melody it was that he played—as weird and desolate as the north wind itself.

I cannot say how long he would have gone on drawing the lingering, mournful notes from

the strings of the old instrument if nothing had interrupted him. But he heard a tiny peck upon the broken casement, and stopped playing at once. He knew that it was one of the Little Gray Doves come for supper a trifle ahead of time.

He hastened to get some dried seeds which he had remembered to bring home the last time he had gone to the Valley for provisions. Then he went out into the snow to feed his small bird friends. The thickly falling flakes clung to his hair and beard, but the Fiddler was used to rough weather, and he liked the snow.

To be sure, his gay doublet with the long sleeves was rather old and thin now, and one felt the cold a bit up on the mountains, but a man could not have everything in this world! And there was peace here, and solitude, and time for thoughts and dreaming. So the Fiddler found no quarrel with the snowstorm, but stood in it stoutly, scattering seed and talking to the Little Gray Doves.

They loved him—he was so big and gentle—

and they would flutter softly about him, and light on his shoulders and wrists, and coo with plaintive notes. Sometimes he would take one in his hands and talk bird-talk to it. And perhaps the Doves understood, for the Fiddler was said to know some of the speech of wild things.

"Little Gray Doves," he said, "I wish that you could tell me how to find my poor Royal Children!"

The cold winter silence had been broken only by the stir of the wind, but suddenly he heard the distant sound of voices—human beings speaking to one another.

The Fiddler started in surprise, and the Little Gray Doves fluttered away. They were afraid of strange Mortals.

He limped to the edge of the clearing and gazed into the depths of the Forest. At last, among the bare, twisted tree-trunks, he saw a man's figure, then another. At once he recognized his old enemies the Wood-cutter and the Broom-maker, and at first he was very angry with them for daring to come. They

had been unkind to him, and he wanted to be alone and at peace. Then he saw a little girl clinging to the hand of the Broom-maker and urging him to go faster. She was his dear little fair-haired friend who had brought him food and sympathy when he was locked up in the dungeon. And he was so pleased to think of seeing her again that he even forgave the two men for coming too.

Still, he could not help feeling suspicious.

"Now I wonder what they want of me?" he said to himself. "It is certain that they must want something, or they would not come here at all!"

And he smiled rather grimly.

The visitors were now near enough for him to hear what they were saying.

"Here, Broom-maker!" the Wood-cutter was exclaiming. "This is where we turn. Dear, dear, dear! Has this demon-path no end?"

"Scamp!" muttered the Fiddler, watching him with folded arms.

"Oh, the sharp frost! Oh, the stinging snow!" whined the Broom-maker.

"Silly old fraud!" commented the Fiddler.

Just then the little girl caught sight of him, and gave a cry of joy. She dropped her father's hand and scampered over the snow like a wild rabbit, to be caught in the Fiddler's big arms.

"Oh, Fiddler! Dear, dear Fiddler!" she cried. "We are coming to see you!"

"You—and you alone—are welcome," he said, tenderly, holding her close. "The old Fiddler will never forget your goodness to him during those dark days in prison! I am glad and thankful to see you again. But how about these gentlemen?" He kept the child's hand in his, and surveyed the Wood-cutter and Broom-maker. They looked very sheepish and crestfallen, and the Fiddler smiled with some scorn.

"Good masters," he said, "I hardly know what to say to you. You see I have learned not to trust you."

"But—but you were set free!" protested the Broom-maker, blurting the words.

"And you only lost the use of one leg!" added the Wood-cutter, as though that were some-

thing about which the Fiddler should feel much pleased. "At least, they didn't burn you up, like the Witch."

"She was punished for her lies!" said the Broom-maker, with solemn satisfaction.

"Yes," said the Fiddler, quietly. "When for once in her life she had told the truth." Suddenly he turned upon them with a frown; the child drew her hand away timidly, he looked so stern.

"Why have you come here?" he demanded. "What do you want of me? My cupboard is empty; I have only a bier of winter willow for my bed. That is all I possess on earth. Yet you are here! What do you expect to get?"

He faced them with all his old energy and power, but his frame was bowed and worn now.

"How bent you are!" said the Wood-cutter, almost pityingly.

The Broom-maker, too, felt sorry. He took a timid step forward.

"We have come in kindness," he said.

The Wood-cutter tried to be encouraging and comforting.

"The City has been good enough to forgive you!" he declared.

The Fiddler laughed shortly. He himself thought that it was his part to forgive the City.

But he was astonished to notice that the clearing was rapidly filling with children—scores and scores of them, bundled up in hoods and cloaks and mufflers, powdered with snow and with eager, rosy faces—all the little friends he had loved of old.

"Oh, Fiddler, dear," said the Broom-maker's little daughter, lovingly, "we are so happy to see you again, all of us! All the children of Hellabrunn have prayed for you every single day."

And as if they could no longer keep silence, all the others gathered round him, crying imploringly:

"Oh, Fiddler! Dear, good, darling Fiddler! Please come back to us! We want you so much! Come back to us, and sing to us again, and tell us stories. Be Our Fiddler once more!"

"Yes, do—do!" pleaded the Broom-maker's

Daughter. . "You may have all our cinnamon pancakes and winter apples and chestnuts—and lots of kisses! Fiddler, dear, we beg you with all our hearts!"

They were nearly crying with eagerness, and the Fiddler was deeply touched. But he thought of the cruelty of Hellabrunn, and all that he had suffered there, and he shook his head.

"It is hard to say no—bitter hard!" he said. "But I have vowed never to enter Hellabrunn again, and I shall keep my word." He turned once more to the Wood-cutter and Broom-maker, and said, bluntly but sorrowfully, "You know well enough why I will not go back—why I will not eat nor drink, sleep nor wake, live nor die within your walls."

His tone seemed to settle the matter, but the Broom-maker plucked up courage to plead their side of the question.

"Be sensible, Fiddler," he besought. "Come back! We have all regretted that fatal King's Day, and we have been in dreadful trouble, one way and another, ever since. And as for the

children—you cannot imagine what a trial they are to us!”

He glanced around to see that they could not overhear him. They were chattering in undertones.

Dropping his own voice, he told the Fiddler about the Conspiracy of the Children; how they talked secretly together, drew away from their elders coldly, and said openly, “Everything is your fault!”

“And they are growing worse all the time!” complained the Broom-maker, wearily. “We do not know what in the world to do with them!”

At this point his small daughter came back to the Fiddler's side, and pulled his sleeve gently.

“Dear Fiddler—” she began, in a soft voice. Then she saw that her father was listening.

“Please go away!” she said to him, with a flash of temper.

The Fiddler was shocked by her cross tone, and shook his head disapprovingly; but he smiled too. I am afraid that the Broom-maker's Daughter was excessively spoilt.

"What is this secret?" he asked, indulgently.

The Broom-maker's Daughter was deeply in earnest.

"You see, it is like this, dear Fiddler," she explained. "We are certain sure that *They* were the King and Queen—you know, Fiddler dear—the boy and girl they drove away that awful day. Well, we want them to come back! And we want you to guide us and help us to find them, because we should lose our way if we tried to go alone. We want to hunt everywhere until we find out where they are. Fiddler, you are kind and good. Please help us to bring the Royal Children home!"

And all the others repeated wistfully, "Yes, dear Fiddler, *please* help us to bring the Royal Children home!"

There was a mist before the good Fiddler's eyes as he saw the eager faces of these loving and loyal little subjects.

"Oh, my dear, innocent ones!" he exclaimed, tenderly. "If I had not been so lame and old I should have gone myself long ago to look for the brave young Prince and his dear little

Lady. But now — see, my children!" He pointed to the white woods about them. "How could we see their footprints? How could we find their hiding-place? No; we must wait until spring comes, I fear. The warm, sweet air will melt the ice and blow the snow away. Then I will go with you gladly, and we will hunt the whole world over until we can kneel before the Royal Children."

The little girl drooped her head in disappointment.

"It is a hundred years till then!" she sighed.

"To me it seems soon," said the Fiddler, gently. For he was old.

Then a strange thing happened to him. The early sunset was at hand, and the dull sky was growing crimson. As he looked dreamily into the misty depths of the Enchanted Forest he distinctly saw a great Shadow against the evening red—a big, dim Shape, that nodded as he looked. The Fiddler did not know who it was, but he called it the Spirit of the Forest.

"Are you waiting for them, good Neighbor?"

he murmured to the Shadow. "I think you are!"

The Wood-cutter's voice broke in sharply:

"Now then, what does the fellow decide? Is he coming with us or not?"

The Fiddler drew a long breath and changed his mind.

"Well—I will go!" said he, suddenly. "But with your children—not with you! So far as you are concerned, I was done with you all long ago. I won't go into your City; I won't eat at your tables, nor have anything to do with you. I don't like you. But I like your children; they and I will go on a searching-party. *You* can go back to Hellabrunn—or you can stay here, if you like, and pry and peer to your heart's content. There's nothing here that you can harm—except my fiddle! Don't you dare touch that!"

He limped vigorously into the Hut, tucked the instrument under his arm, and came out again. The Wood-cutter and the Broom-maker were already peeping in through the dark doorway.

"Would you like to go into my festal hall?"

the Fiddler remarked to them, cheerfully. "You are welcome to what the rats have left! Come, children, our way lies in the opposite direction!"

The little ones flocked about him, and they left the clearing together to begin their search for the King's Son and the Goose Girl. The Fiddler limped very fast, as though the affection of the children and the new hope they had brought had made him feel young and strong again.

The Wood-cutter and the Broom-maker were still somewhat afraid of the Witch's Hut. They recalled the gruesome tales they had heard of her evil deeds, and they had a sneaking belief that her ghost might be lurking in the neighborhood. But they were devoured with curiosity, and besides it was beginning to snow harder than ever, and they longed for a shelter. So they overcame their terrors, entered, and shut the rickety door. And there they had a beautiful time trying to find the treasure which they had heard the Witch had kept hidden there.

The Cat and the Raven must have spirited it away, by-the-by, for no Mortal ever found a single penny of all the Witch's riches.

Once more the clearing was empty. The snow was whirling into drifts; the sky was darkening. In the windy distance the Fiddler was singing a song to the little Goose Girl who wore a Crown:

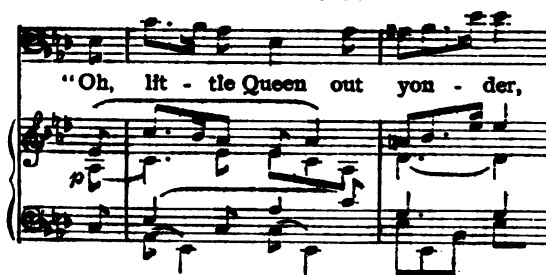
"Oh, little Queen out yonder,
Lost in the world to-day,
Where do you wait or wander,
Upon your true love's way?

"Since your dear face has left us
The earth goes sorrowing;
The field-flowers have bereft us,
The wood-birds do not sing.

"You little maid so sweet and fair,
You little Queen with golden hair,
If I might kneel and kiss your hand"—

A wild gust of wind blew the song away.

THE FIDDLER'S SONG



CHAPTER XVII

THE ROYAL BEGGARS

Here are three of the old melodies of the King's Son and the Goose Girl, heard once more on their return to the frozen clearing. They are changed, and now sound as desolate as the winter wind itself.



I SUPPOSE no one will ever know the true story of the wanderings of the King's Son and the Goose Girl. In all the months that they

roamed the mountain range they never saw a Mortal creature. They had a wild Kingdom all their own, and the Spirit of the Forest was their only companion.

The King's Son never saw the Spirit. Our Prince was a healthy lad, more interested in real life than in shadows, and just now his mind was busy with taking care of the Goose Girl and getting safely across the Wonderful Mountains. So he never glanced at the still, dim Shape, though often it was quite close to him.

But the Goose Girl, who was more given to dreams than he, and who had been trained to notice magic, knew the Spirit very well. She was a little afraid of it in her heart, but the Shadow sometimes nodded to her in a friendly way, as though its meaning were kind.

Yes, the Spirit of the Forest was kind to them for a time. For a little while the Royal Children were allowed to find rest after the sufferings they had met at human hands. Stoned, bruised, hurt in heart as well as in body, they had sought refuge in the green woodlands on the Wonderful Mountains. Al-

though their wish was to cross the range and enter the Contented Kingdom, where a Throne awaited them, they were obliged to travel slowly and plan their way with care.

They were very fortunate at the outset. They always found caverns to shelter them, and the Forest spread carpets of flower-starred moss before them. The sun was gentle to them, and the night-dews did not hurt them. The King's Son shot game from time to time with his bow and arrows. But they lived chiefly upon the wild fruits and savory herbs which the Goose Girl gathered. She knew a great deal about roots and berries and all growing things; she could tell what to avoid and what to seek. This one good thing she owed to her childhood with the Witch.

Thus they kept alive, and their brave young hearts kept them hopeful and of good cheer. But they were not anxious to wander forever in the woods. Day by day they journeyed onward and tried to climb the mountain range. But they never met with success. The Forest, which had begun by making everything easy

for them, soon seemed to check and thwart them. The weather grew chill, and they found it harder and harder to find things to eat.

We cannot know whether the Spirit of the Forest was cruel or not. It seems unkind and needless to have kept the poor boy and girl away from their Contented Kingdom, and to have made them suffer cold and privation. But Forests are strange things, especially Enchanted Forests. When the world was still young, men used to worship the spirits of the great woods, knowing that they were wise, and wonderful, and strong. So perhaps this particular Forest Spirit had a reason for giving such troubles to the Royal Children. Possibly they had to prove themselves royal in a hundred hard, small ways before they could be allowed to really reign over a Kingdom.

When the King's Son had crossed the chain of Wonderful Mountains in the summer he had been alone and not afraid to take great risks of life and limb. He had clambered over crags, waded through swollen streams, leaped chasms, and dashed down rocky inclines that you would

grow dizzy just to see. The joy of his new freedom and the delight of his own hardy body had made him careless and daring. So he had met the good luck which reckless persons sometimes do find, and had come safely through a hundred perils.

But things were quite different now that he had a girl to take care of. The Goose Girl was as brave as a little maiden could be, and tried her best not to be a burden nor a worry. But it was impossible for the King's Son to travel as fast with her as when he had been alone; and then, too, he did not dare to take half so many risks—on her account. Though he had never been afraid for himself, he was often deeply afraid for her.

They tried again and again to cross the range, but there was always some barrier in their way. Icy cliffs rose before them; dreadful ravines, black and dangerous, seemed to open at their feet; and the increasing cold and the hungry wild beasts filled the King's Son with anxiety. He could not help seeing that the Goose Girl was growing pale and thin,

and it seemed to him that he should *never* be able to get the little maid safe home to his own comfortable Kingdom.

At last the Goose Girl grew ill from weakness and bitter weather. She was faint and feverish, and could no longer walk. So the King's Son carried her, though now he, too, was not so strong as he had been. And around them the snow fell and the winds blew, and the branches bent to and fro against a sky that was always overcast nowadays.

At last, one day, half blinded by the driving snow, and dizzy with weariness, the King's Son reached a little clear spot among the wilderness of trees.

The Goose Girl begged him weakly not to carry her any longer, and he put her down, assuring her all the while that she was "not a bit too heavy"! The two poor wanderers stood in the snow and wind and looked wonderingly about them.

Slowly they realized where they were. In spite of the harsh changes made by winter; in spite of the ice in the stone spring-basin, and

the weight of snow on the crooked roof; in spite of the bare boughs of the linden-tree, and the lonely and desolate look of the place, they could see that they had found their way unknowing to the clearing by the Witch's Hut.

"How strange!" murmured the Goose Girl, looking about her. "I remember it all so well! See! The spring—and the linden-tree!"

Her eyes filled with tears. She was very tired, and even the sight of the dismal little clearing touched her after all her wanderings.

"The spring is frozen, my dear," said the King's Son, gently. "And the linden-tree is bare. Forgive me for having brought you here. . . . I did not know."

The snow was whirling about them. The Goose Girl drew her rough cloak about her. It was coarse and old, the gift of a generous farming-woman. She sat down on the icy edge of the stone basin and shivered.

"I will see if any one lives here now," said the King's Son. And he went and knocked on the little door.

"Open, good people!" he called. "Whoever you are, we beg of you to open!"

It was on this same afternoon, you know, that the Wood-cutter and Broom-maker had gone to poke about the Hut.

The Wood-cutter opened the window and looked out scowling.

"Who is there?" he snapped. "And what is your business?"

The King's Son had once found it hard to beg for bread and water, but that was for himself. Now he was thinking of the poor Goose Girl, whom he knew needed food. And he spoke eagerly:

"Good masters, I must ask you for a piece of bread and a cup of water for this little maid, who is ill and weary."

The Wood-cutter frowned more crossly than ever. He could not see very clearly in the growing dimness and swirling snow, and, of course, he did not recognize the King's Son. His hard heart was not at all moved by the thought of a girl starving in the storm.

"This isn't an inn!" he growled. "Bread, forsooth! What nonsense!"

And he slammed the window shut again.

The King's Son felt his head swim with rage and disappointment. He was so indignant for the Goose Girl's sake that it seemed as though his heart would break.

"Ah, dog! Dog!" he cried, hotly, clenching his hands.

The little Goose Girl spoke gently from the edge of the frozen spring.

"We are beggars," she reminded him.

The King's Son dropped his hands, and his fury gave place to despair.

She found an old dead branch blown down by the wind, and swept away the snow under the barren linden-tree.

"Come and sit down," she said. "The trunk will shelter us a little from the storm."

The King's Son dropped down in the snow beside her.

"We should be traveling on soon," he said, anxiously. "We must keep on hunting for the path that leads across the mountain."

The Goose Girl shook her head.

"What's the use in this snow?" she said.

"I can't endure it!" groaned the King's Son, desperately. "I can't stand seeing you half frozen and all but starved! I believe that you are dying before my eyes—and there's nothing I can do! There's nothing I can do!"

The little Goose Girl laughed bravely, brushing the snow out of her eyes.

"How silly!" she said, cheerfully. "Look now, and listen! I am going to show you whether or not I'm half dead."

She could not bear to see him grieve for her so bitterly, so she sprang up and tossed her cloak aside as though she did not feel the cold one bit.

She racked her tired little brain for a song to sing. Her old Spindle Song—the fragment that she used to hum—drifted through her mind:

". . . I wish—

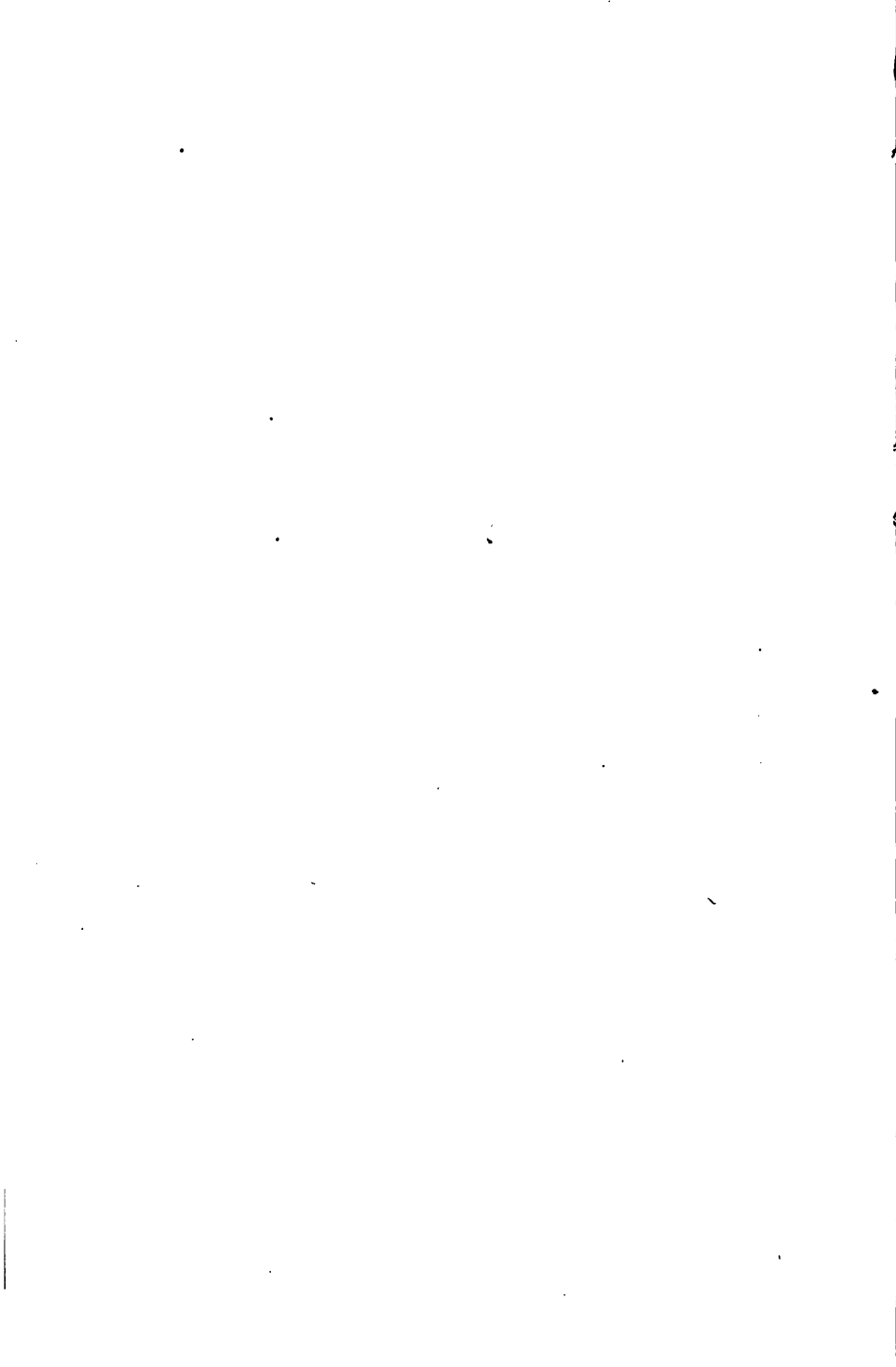
That I—

Had a silver spindle!" . . .

No; she could not remember enough of that. But her head seemed suddenly full of songs—



THE LITTLE GOOSE GIRL LAUGHED BRAVELY, BRUSHING THE SNOW
FROM HER EYES



queer, foolish jingles, with plaintive airs. She could not think where she had heard them all, and she did not know their names.

Swaying from weakness and fatigue, the Goose Girl tripped back and forth in the snow, singing in her clear voice:

"From a far distance my love came faring,
Blithe as the summer, and gay as the wind.
Doublet and smock of fine silk he was wearing;
Linen or woolen too harsh he would find!"

She walked a wee bit more slowly; her feet dragged in the snow. Her song got sadly mixed up in her dizzy brain:

"Summer-snow—and winter-May—
Burned him with frost, and froze him with
flowers"—

Her lips faltered over the meaningless words; but she sang on:

"—His silken doublet was wet with showers,
And my silver spindle—I broke—to-day!"

And with that the Goose Girl fainted away in a miserable little heap on the snow.

The King's Son was wild with fear. He raised her, and rubbed her hands, and begged her to speak to him. And at last she opened her eyes, and sat up, trying to smile.

Suddenly, quite close to her, she saw the Spirit of the Forest. And this time she could see plainly that the Spirit was smiling at her.

"You follow me everywhere," she murmured. "Do you want me to go with you? Is that what you are waiting for? Ah, but I will not go! I will not leave my King!"

And again she smiled.

The Shadow faded. . . . The King's Son looked puzzled.

"It's odd," he said; "I thought I saw someone standing beside you just then. I must be going crazy! It seemed as though you were talking to some one."

He looked down for a moment in silence at the pale little maid in the snow. Then he raised his hands in a gesture of despair.

"First I would not rule!" he cried, bitterly. "And now I cannot even beg! If I had gold

I could buy you food and shelter and all you need. But I cannot earn any money either. What can I do? What *can* I do? If I only had gold—gold!”

Then his face lighted up; his heart swelled with a wonderful idea; new hope flashed through him.

“I have!” he gasped. “I *have* gold! Why have I never thought of it before?”

His staff, crossbow, arrow-quiver, and bundle were lying in the snow. Breathless and almost sobbing, he knelt to unfasten the little bundle with shaking fingers. During their wanderings he and the Goose Girl had always carried the Crown tied up in that big handkerchief. It had been rather in the way, but they would not leave it behind anywhere.

“What are you going to do now?” asked the Goose Girl, anxiously.

The King’s Son sprang to his feet. He held up the big, red-gold circle, and the brightness of it blazed even through the falling snow.

“I am going to buy you some bread!” he

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CROWN AND THE CAKE

WHEN THEY ATE THE MAGIC CAKE



(You see the music is the same as the spells that were said when it was mixed!)

THE Goose Girl gave a little cry, and rose to her feet trembling. The very idea horrified her. To drive such a bargain—and with the beautiful, precious Crown—the sign of their royalty, the sacred trust of the Kingdom! It was not to be thought of!

“King,” she said, warningly, “do not sell your Crown!”

The King’s Son looked at her grave face, and shook his head.

"I must, dear!" he said. "If my father and mother and all my subjects prayed me not to, I should still have to do it, to buy you bread."

But the Goose Girl persisted, stretching out her hands pleadingly.

"King, do not sell your Crown!" she cried.

The King's Son looked past her with a puzzled expression.

"It's odd! I saw the Shadow again," he muttered. Perhaps the Spirit of the Forest also was trying to warn him. But if so it was in vain. The boy turned resolutely to the shut door of the Hut.

The Goose Girl fell on her knees in the snow.

"King!" she implored, for the third time.

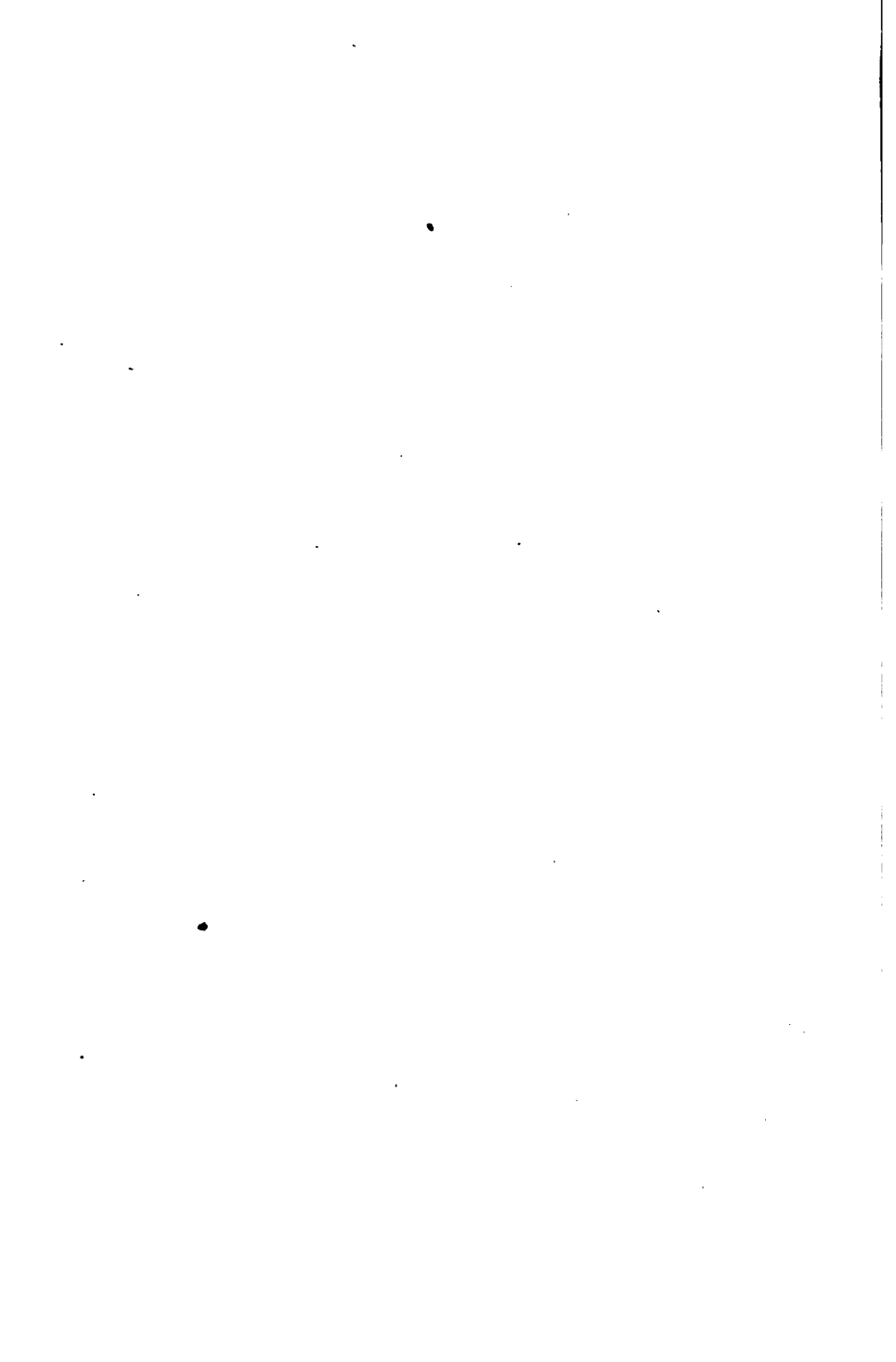
"Do not sell your Crown!"

"I am nothing but a beggar now," said the King's Son, and he looked at his Crown. "But perhaps I can make myself a King for one final moment. My last royal act is—to break my Crown in pieces!"

And he brought the delicate, rich circle crashing down upon his knee. It fell in two



"MY LAST ROYAL ACT IS—TO BREAK MY CROWN IN PIECES!"



pieces—useful as gold, perchance, but no longer a Crown.

The Goose Girl covered her face with her hands. In that moment the Kingdom seemed to her very, very far away. And, who could tell what strange or sad things might happen after such a mad deed as this?

The King's Son strode with eager steps to the Hut, and knocked briskly upon the door.

Again the Wood-cutter looked out of the window—in a very bad temper this time.

"Are you trying to break down the door?" he demanded, harshly.

"I have a good bargain for you, friend!" said the King's Son, in a queer, breathless way. He was smiling, but he was very pale.

"Here is a bit of gold!" He held out one gleaming half-circle. "I offer it to you freely for some food and a place to sleep."

"Gold? Let's have a look at it!" said the surly Wood-cutter, with a shade more interest.

"Hey, Broom-maker! Come here a moment!"

The Broom-maker was still poking about inside the cottage, and grumbling to himself.

"It is enough to make an honest man swear!" he muttered, peevishly. "Here I have been wasting all this time hunting for something valuable, and all I have been able to find here is an old cake hidden away on a shelf under the eaves!"

And he grunted with disgust.

"Look at this!" said the Wood-cutter.

"Aha! Gold, eh?" said the Broom-maker. And they examined the broken Crown.

"He—this beggar-fellow here—wants shelter and food in exchange for it," explained the Wood-cutter, squinting at the brilliant metal, as though it dazzled his eyes.

"You can't get shelter here, my lad!" declared the Broom-maker, shaking his head. But he glanced greedily at the gold.

"Then give me some bread!" said the King's Son, who was reckless by this time. "The—the little maid is hungry!" he added, desperately.

"All right," replied the Wood-cutter, grudgingly. "But this one piece of gold is not enough. Here!" He seized the old cake just

found by the Broom-maker. "Here is a beautiful little loaf for you! But we must have both those pieces of gold, whatever they are. Worth nothing, probably."

"Take them! Take it all!" exclaimed the King's Son, pressing the two bright halves into the man's hands. "Only give me the loaf!"

They handed him the little cake, and hastily shut the window, well pleased with their bargain, though too ignorant to know the true value of the broken Crown.

The King's Son dashed across the clearing to where the Goose Girl was sitting. She was huddled against the trunk of the linden-tree once more, trying to keep warm.

"Here is bread—or cake—or something!" he cried, hardly able to speak for joy. "Food, dearest little girl—food! Oh, take it and eat it, dear—eat it *at once!*"

The little Goose Girl smiled at him, but her eyes were wet.

"Not by myself!" she said, softly. "You, too!"

"Oh, well then!" said the King's Son, im-

patiently but tenderly. "Give me a piece of the crust if it makes you any happier."

The Goose Girl took the little loaf and broke it in two. Bread or cake, it was wonderfully fresh and good, as though it had been newly baked.

And yet it had been lying on the shelf in the Witch's Hut for months and months. . . . Can you guess what it was?

It was the Magic Cake which the Goose Girl had helped the Witch to mix that baking-day in the long-ago summer.

Do you remember the two spells which they had repeated over the dough? The Witch had declared that it would never grow hard nor stale; and that they who ate of it would sleep forever. And the Goose Girl had said:

"Who eats this Cake shall see his love so true!

Who eats this Cake shall have his dream come true!"

Now which of those two spells do you suppose was the stronger? Perhaps both of them were powerful to work in different ways. Both of them were Magic, you see; and this was an Enchanted Forest!

The King's Son and the Goose Girl sat in the drifting snow under the linden-tree, and ate the Magic Cake. And the Spirit of the Forest drew nearer and nearer. They could not have helped seeing it if they had turned their heads, for it stood just behind them, smiling down upon them as though it knew that they were going to be very happy at last.

And now happened the most wonderful thing that you could possibly imagine. As they ate the Magic Cake the King's Son and the Goose Girl saw suddenly that the Enchanted Forest had grown green again!

To the Wood-cutter and the Broom-maker it was still winter and winter weather, and I think that it would have been so to you, or to me; but to the Royal Children it was summer.

They felt dreamy and strange, unlike themselves, but quite gay and well now. They jested together as they ate the Magic Cake, and quarreled merrily over who should be forced to eat the biggest share. And they smiled, forgetting that they were still beggars,

and no longer feeling the snow that fell heavily upon them.

They had lost count of time, and found their memories much confused. They spoke of past happenings, and could not say if it had been last year or yesterday. But they felt glad, and safe, and beautifully warm.

The woodland was green and fragrant again, and the wind was the south breeze of midsummer, light and warm, and sweet with a million flowers. And the linden was once more in bloom. The falling snowflakes became to their dazzled eyes a misty veil of silver, such as one sees at dawn. . . . No! Now it was a cloud of white petals blown from flowering shrubs! And there were sunbeams all of rosy gold, and the musical murmur of the swiftly running spring. . . .

The Goose Girl seemed to hear again the cackling of her Geese. They had all been lost in the Fairy Wood long since, but she fancied that she could see them waddling about and nibbling at the growing things they found.

"You have frightened my flock!" she laughed

The Crown and the Cake 265

to the King's Son. "You came so suddenly over the edge of the hill there. . . . You frightened me, too!"

The snow was falling more and more thickly, and the north wind was cruelly keen. But to the Royal Children the world was still bright and beautiful. For they had eaten of the Magic Cake, and the Spirit of the Forest stood beside them.

Then to the King's Son the Spirit gave a sudden and thrilling vision.

The gleaming, silvery mist before him opened like parting clouds, and directly ahead he could see the great steps of the Royal Palace in the Contented Kingdom. The castle doors were open, and there were banks of flowers and lengths and lengths of green garlands in honor of their home-coming. His dogs were bounding to meet him, and hundreds of knights and men-at-arms in glittering armor stood ranged on either side. They waved bright banners, and struck their shields with their big swords till the air rang and rang again with the fine clash of steel. And, one and all, they shouted:

"Long live the King! Long live our King and Queen!"

Then, in his dream—the Magic Dream—the King's Son took the Goose Girl's hand in his, and led her up those splendid, shining steps. . . .

"Listen!" he cried. "Can you not hear them shout? How they cry out to welcome you, dear girl! And how proud they are all going to be of you! Come, little Queen! Enter into your Kingdom!"

The vision faded.

All this time the snow fell and the wind howled, but they did not know. They were dreaming the Magic Dream.

"I am so warm—and sleepy—and happy!" whispered the Goose Girl, drowsily. "I simply can't keep awake!"

"I feel so, too," said the King's Son, with nodding head. "I—I think I am dizzy— It is strange—"

"I—I'm falling asleep!" faltered the Goose Girl, sinking back into the soft, cold snow.

"We'll soon wake up again," murmured the King's Son, his eyes closing. "And then—"

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we'll start for—home! . . . And we'll pick roses—”

And he fell sound asleep.

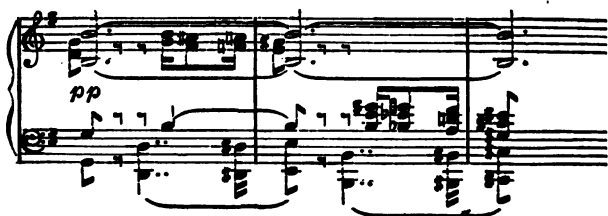
The Goose Girl was just drifting off when she saw the Spirit of the Forest bending over her.

“The Spirit!” she breathed. “Don’t take me from him—ever!”

And she closed her eyes.

The Spirit of the Forest mounted guard over them, and they slept in the snow.

SOME OF THE MUSIC OF THE SHADOW THAT WATCHED
OVER THE ROYAL CHILDREN



CHAPTER XIX

THE FIDDLER'S LAST SONG

There were many melodies in the Fiddler's last song, some new and some very old. Here are three of them; two you will recognize:



THE snow fell and fell, and all the clearing was white and beautiful. There was no sign of the Royal Children. There was a great drift under the linden-tree, that was all. And safe in the heart of it they slept, wrapped in their Magic Dream.



THEY SLEPT, WRAPPED IN THEIR MAGIC DREAM

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After a time the storm ceased. The leaden clouds stole softly out of the sky, and in the clearing west was the last of the sunset red. The snowbanks and the ice-covered boughs were faintly rosy, and the long shadows lay motionless on the stretch of white. The wind, too, had died down. The Wood was quiet and lovely now.

The Fiddler and the children came into the clearing. They were tired, but not discouraged. They had walked far through the woods, and called again and again, but of course they had met with no success. The little folk were disappointed not to have found at least a trace of the Royal Children, but the Fiddler told them to be of good cheer. The wind had changed; the weather was clearing. To-morrow they would search again, and the next day, and the next!

The door of the Hut opened, and out came the Wood-cutter and the Broom-maker. They carried the broken Crown.

"See, Fiddler!" cried the Wood-cutter. "This has just been given to us. What do you make of it?"

"A beggar-boy had it," explained the Broom-maker. "Perhaps you met him. He was here a short time ago asking for food."

The Fiddler, a trifle puzzled, took the broken circle in his hands. He fitted the gleaming pieces together, and stood staring down at what he held. Then he gave a cry:

"The Crown!"

He knew now that the Royal Children were somewhere near.

"A beggar-boy, you say? A beggar-boy!" he exclaimed. "Which way did he go? Quick!"

"Here, now!" growled the Wood-cutter, suspiciously. "Give us back our property first! We got that gold thing fairly in exchange for a loaf of bread.

The Fiddler's great, warm heart nearly broke when he heard that.

"He gave this for a crust of bread!" he groaned. "He sold the Crown for food!"

He limped to the edge of the clearing, and cried into the silent woods:

"Royal Children! Where are you? Where

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shall we look for you? Royal Children! Royal Children! Royal Children!"

There was silence.

But one of the Little Gray Doves fluttered across the hushed white clearing.

"Look, Fiddler!" exclaimed the Broom-maker's Daughter. "Look at the Dove!"

The tiny bird was circling about the linden-tree, as though with some purpose of its own.

"Little Gray Dove," said the Fiddler, "do you know where they are?"

The Dove fluttered lower. I think it was answering him.

Then the Fiddler saw a Shadow standing motionless beneath the snow-weighted linden, and his heart beat faster. He knew that it was the Spirit of the Forest. But no one else could see it at all.

Very quietly the Fiddler ~~knelt and brushed~~ away the snow with a gentle hand.

It was as he thought. There lay the Royal Children asleep and smiling.

The Broom-maker's Daughter and the others began to cry. But the Fiddler did not even

want to cry. He knew that the Spirit of the Forest was taking care of the King's Son and the Goose Girl, and that they were quite safe now.

"You dear children," he said, tenderly, to the sobbing little ones, "we have both found and lost them, you see. You may cry if you like for yourselves, but not for them. The older folk did not understand, and they were cruel to them and drove them away. But you followed them with hearts full of love. You shall give them royal honors at last."

The Royal Children had passed out of Mortal keeping forever. They were in a Magic Dream, and whether they would wake from it or not, and what would come to them if they did—these were things which no human being, not even the wise Fiddler, could tell. So he bade the Hellabrunn children carry the sleeping boy and girl up to the very highest crag that they could climb. There, on a real mountain Throne, they must leave them. The rest was with the Spirit of the Forest.

Then the Fiddler spoke in a new way—a way that was strange and solemn and very

beautiful. They listened as though he were an angel—this gray, bowed man with the battered fiddle strapped upon his shoulder. For his long life, and the many wonderful dreams that he had put into songs, had made him nobler and tenderer than other men. And this, his latest and deepest grief, had made him very, very wise—wiser than Mortals are usually allowed to be.

"I am old now," he finally said. "Too old to play or sing any more, and far too sad. I shall break my beloved fiddle in two and lay it at the feet of the Royal Children as my humble offering. And no one will ever hear the Fiddler make music again. But you, my children—my little friends—shall be my instrument! You shall be like the different strings of a big violin, that will still echo sweetly the songs that I have sung. You will remember what I have played to you; and you will remember the tales I have told you, and the things I have tried to teach you. And above all you will remember the Royal Children. You must never all your lives forget the King's Son and the

Goose Girl, even if you never see them nor hear of them again. They have been tried and proved, and are truly a King and Queen. Be like them, if you can."

Then they carried the King's Son and the Goose Girl up to a high, high place, where the winds blew, and the wild birds flew and called. And they laid the broken Crown between them, and the King's Sword at their feet. And then the Fiddler sang his Last Song.

The Fiddler's Last Song was very strange. It was all about love, and courage, and hope—and yet it was not merry. It was about farewells, and pain, and dreams, and memory—yet it was not sad. His listeners did not understand it, yet they knew that never while they lived could they forget it. And the ending of it, as the Fiddler sang it in his great voice, was as solemn as the bells of noon on the King's Day:

"Heaven and earth shall sing the story;
Those who sleep shall awake in glory!
And your hearts shall crown them—the Royal
Children!"